Frank E. Merrill

THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

COMPLETE TRANSLATION
FROM THE LATEST FRENCH EDITION

VOLUME I.

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INTRODUCTION.

1660–1671.

THE third and last of the series of D'Artagnan romances is *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, which chronicles the old age (if such men could grow old) and death of D'Artagnan and his three musketeer comrades. In *The Three Musketeers* the four soldiers are first brought upon the stage — already fully equipped and ready for any gage of battle. For Dumas does not concern himself or the reader with any probationary period. His men must step forth as men, ready to fight at a moment's notice, in these pages so full of action. In the second story, *Twenty Years After*, we find the four companions to be middle-aged men, but still in the very heyday of their fire and strength. They have no longer to cope with a Richelieu; and Mazarin is but a man of straw in their hands. Finally the last scene is presented by *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the subtitle of which — *Ten Years Later* — fixes its place in the lives of the four. Their locks are grizzled now; and while they fight at first with all their old heroic ardor, their arms gradually become the more easily wearied, and their heads sit not so erect upon their shoulders. Mazarin precedes them to the grave, but in his stead they find the most invincible adversary of them all in the person of the young and increasing figure of Louis XIV.

The Vicomte de Bragelonne in the original consists of six parts, though the same title applies to all. For purposes of mechanical convenience it is here presented in three volumes, every line of the original, however, being faithfully reproduced. Various parts of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* have been presented separately in the English under different titles. Parts I. and II. have been known as *The Vicomte de Bragelonne;* Parts III. and IV. as *Louise de la Vallière;* and Parts

V. and VI. as *The Man in the Iron Mask*. These titles, however, are arbitrary with the publishers, since, as stated above, the entire six parts originally bear but one title. A careful reading of *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* as a whole will justify Dumas' choice of titles. The six parts, though forming a story of considerable length, are closely inter-related, and cannot be severed the one from the other without serious loss to the completed plot. And the character of Raoul, Vicomte de Bragelonne, the son of Athos, and the foster-son of the other three friends, serves as a fit connecting link between these men so widely separated by time and interest, yet so close in touch when throbs of genuine affection are listened to. Raoul, therefore, becomes a sort of central point for the four soldiers of fortune, connecting them more closely with each other, and at the same time with the movements of the younger count. In him the four men live again their own adventurous lives. But this does not mean that they themselves are idle and inactive; each has his part in life yet to finish, and the part is played to the end.

The period covered by the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* (1660–1671) is a momentous one in the history of France. It is a time when the young monarch Louis XIV. is beginning to assume personal control and make his kingdom the foremost in the world. The action stays upon French soil, save for a brief excursion over to England to witness the restoration of the Stuart dynasty, this being a pendant or sequel to the bloody episode narrated in *Twenty Years After*, when Charles I. lost his head.

First of all let us glance at our beloved friend D'Artagnan. True to his trade we find him still in harness, responding quickly to the first call of his King. The first attribute of D'Artagnan is his fidelity. He may make mistakes in judgment, indeed, very rarely. He may allow his personal feelings to encroach too much upon official business, though never in a treasonable way. But back of it all beats a heart faithful to its trust, a heart upon which ambitious kings and crafty prelates can rely. Yes, the D'Artagnan of former days still greets us with his *bonhomerie*, his bluntness, his intuition, his wit, and his consummate skill in fencing, whether with swords or sentences. What more natural than that the young monarch should hit upon such a man as he to wield his sword? In the years when Louis XIV.'s name begins to spread over and be-

yond the confines of France, the picturesque figure of D'Artagnan stands out as a necessary adjunct. So vividly is it impressed upon that epoch, that we cannot believe it to be any less real than is the figure of the King. The two are correlative. How nicely does this touch come out in that scene near the last where D'Artagnan is suddenly made to realize that his King is indeed his master in word and in deed! D'Artagnan had been sent to arrest his two friends, then arch rebels, in Belle-Isle. He was presumptuous enough (and we cannot help loving him for it) to try to twist the royal orders so as to allow his friends a loophole of escape. Foiled at every turn, D'Artagnan with his old-time braggadocio hastens back to brazen it out with the King; when he is taught that times have changed, that the King is not to be putty in his hands, as others have been, but is to mould all other men for himself. The lesson is for D'Artagnan a severe one; but once learned it is never forgotten, and with the new ideals of a broader empire dawning upon him, he is able once more to place himself at the head of the royal troops, to win glory for his sovereign, and to seize the marshal's baton in his own dying grasp. The death comes as an epitome of the life. It grieves us and yet we know it is a just, a glorious culmination of a magnificent career. We cannot bemoan a death heroically quenching a life whose embers were growing gray before the increasing glow of the sun of Louis XIV.

Next to D'Artagnan the face of Athos stands out the most attractively. Athos is the most perfect of them all. But while such perfection attracts us, we persevere in loving the very faults of D'Artagnan. A king-like figure is that of Athos — a gentleman of the old school serving the only three masters that he recognized, — his God, his honor, and his King. The only trace of snobbery we find in him is in his interview with the complacent Planchet. This he allows to escape merely as a rebuke and a lesson in the recognized etiquette of that day. His devotion to the King as his visible head meets with a severe shock when the monarch's conduct toward Raoul merits censure; and the scene between Athos and Louis is worthy the lion of the olden days. Still it is the strength of his son that pulsates with his own, and when the son retires heart-broken from the contest, the spirit of the father breaks likewise. The ebbing tide carries out the two souls together. The closing chapters of his life are perused with a strained

eagerness. At last the tale is told, the calm eyes close in death. We hear the convulsive sobs of D'Artagnan, and we speak this epitaph: "Here was a man!"

But what can we say of Aramis, the crafty, scheming Aramis? We are surprised at first at the depths of this man's duplicity. Still we should have traced his growth through the other stories; it is a logical growth, and the Aramis of the end is the natural outcome of it all. The only palliating side to his character is his love for his friends — a love, however, which he does not hesitate to thrust aside for schemes of self-advancement. He is a diplomat of the Richelieu type, a man brilliant in intrigue, far-seeing in execution. If he could only have kept his heart warm through it all we could have persuaded ourselves to love him. Dumas displays a master genius in choosing such a character as Aramis for the General of the Jesuits. The General is typical of the Order, and the Order is concisely summed up in the General. Dumas himself loses interest in Aramis, in proportion as Aramis becomes self-centred. It is noticeable that he of them all is the only one whose manner of death is left unrecorded. A crushing rebuke, this, when the passing away of the others is dealt with so tenderly and inspiringly. The prophetic D'Artagnan with his dying breath summed up the final sentence, one fraught with tragic meaning, burdened as it was with the memory of years of comradery for four souls in the past, for only three in the future: "Athos, Porthos, we meet again; Aramis, adieu forever!"

And Porthos — brave Porthos! worthy Porthos! He, mighty of brawn, strong of heart, must needs give his life in the service of others — must fall a victim to Aramis' ambitious plans. But — as with the others — his end is a summing up of all his life. Let us hear what Dumas says of him in the superb chapter devoted to his "Epitaph":

"Singular destiny of these men of bronze! The most guileless of human beings allied to the craftiest; bodily strength swayed by subtlety of mind! . . . Honest Porthos! born to help others, always ready to sacrifice himself for the safety of the weak, as if it was for that purpose only that God had endowed him with such strength."

The chapters devoted to the Titanic struggle and death of Porthos are among the most spirited in this book of spirited chapters.

The titular hero, Raoul, is, after all, a little disappointing. He has much of the calmness and chivalry of his father, but he acts too often according to rote. Perhaps his shining qualities are a trifle dimmed by proximity with the glorious four. Perhaps the love for a woman dwarfs his resolution and natural good sense. Be that as it may, we feel that he does not uphold the brave front demanded of him by birth and environment. We sympathize with the jilted lover, but cannot condone the melancholia and suicidal instincts of the soldier. Too much was demanded of his life to allow it to become stunted and obliterated because of any passion, no matter how strong.

Louise de la Vallière is not worthy of the extreme love which she elicits. She is modest, gentle, and retiring, but she displays small strength of character. Only once or twice does a fitful gleam betray the workings of an inner spirit. It is hard to condemn her relations with Louis. Undoubtedly she loved him with a sincere, personal affection. Nor did she allow her love to transcend the limits of her modesty. As to her relations with the king, we cannot, with our twentieth-century code of morals, judge the attitude that prevailed at a time when the maintenance of mistresses was a part of the divine right of kings.

The rival figures of Fouquet and Colbert possess both a fictitious and a historical interest. As Fouquet wanes Colbert waxes. The transition is inevitable. In the destinies of these two men are seen the signs of a newer and broader empire reared upon the crumbling foundations of the old. Fouquet represented the barons and great lords of a former day, whose power made even their sovereigns to quail, and whose official honesty could not be impeached, because their individual strength precluded justice. Fouquet himself, despite the protestations of Dumas, who remains his steadfast champion, if not dishonest in his own official dealings was at least ready to wink at the malfeasance of his colleagues. He looked upon the common people as the ministry's natural prey. His own world was to him a place where money could flow like water, where friends could revel and feast unstintedly, and where the King himself could be courteously sneered at. Such a man must inevitably fall before the march of greater national events represented in the person of the despised Colbert. The latter might not have cultivated the arts and sciences under his own roof; he might not have been so much *monseigneur*

as *monsieur;* but he did labor unceasingly and successfully for the advancement of Louis' power. He created navies, levied armies, reduced the national debt, and enforced national respect, but all so quietly that Dumas himself — in company with the astute D'Artagnan and Aramis — is astounded, and is compelled to bow respectfully before the man he has persistently misunderstood and maligned.

The pathetic figure of the "Man in the Iron Mask" stands out in bold relief, though treated very briefly. Our farewell glimpse of him is upon the parapet of the fortress at Île Sainte-Marguerite, contemplating the infinite horizon wherein others were to soar untrammelled, while he remained with clipped pinions behind prison bars. This character, one of the most puzzling in history, is used in a daring way by Dumas. The novelist weaves him into the woof of the story most ingeniously by making him the twin-brother of Louis. The theory obtained credence in France at one time, but is now received with fictitious rather than historical interest.

In regard to the other characters that crowd the canvas, only a few words may be uttered here. Mazarin plays no extended part in this story, nevertheless is true to motives we find impelling him in *Twenty Years After*. His death removes the final impediment to the progress of the King. A graphic picture is given of the youthful Louis XIV. With his court he lives again for us. The development of his character from its inner and outer aspect is sketched with a psychological insight unusual with Dumas, who generally contents himself with the sparkle and gusto of exploit. The after life of the four original lackeys forms an amusing parallel to the fate of their masters. The character of "Madame" is interesting enough to arouse regret that it should be neglected towards the last.

As we take a farewell glance at the long and turbulent career of the four comrades we realize that they grew, day by day, not through any set purpose of their author, but gradually, as men grow in life. Dumas himself does not seem to have divined the growth till it was accomplished. Each man worked out his own destiny from the raw material. D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* are not the same characters of *Twenty Years After* or *The Three Musketeers*. D'Artagnan learned that other authorities may arise beside his own stubborn will; he learned that his lode-star was not self-advancement, but *service*. Athos

discovered the beauty of a vicarious existence ; the strength of example above precept. Porthos found that vanity and worldly pride are secondary to self-sacrifice. Aramis, looking with dimmed, aching eyes at the rocky sepulchre of Belle-Isle, realized that all the intrigues and advancements of a world cannot replace a friend. Step by step these men advanced, and with each step was wrought an irrevocable change until at last each had worked out his mission upon earth. And if his motives remained fixed and grounded upon Friendship and Honor and Chivalry, he could well go to his final repose like one who "wraps the drapery of his couch about him and lies down to pleasant dreams."

J. Walker McSpadden.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA, queen mother.
ARAMIS, successively Abbé d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes, General of the Order of Jesuits, and Duc d'Alaméda.
ARISTE, clerk of Brienne.
ARNOUX, MLLE., of the court.
ATHOS, Comte de la Fère.
BAISEMEAUX DE MONTLEZUN, DE, Governor of Bastille.
BAZIN, former lackey to Aramis.
BEAUFORT, DUC DE, grandson of Henri IV.
BELLIÈRE, MARQUISE ELISE DE, of the court.
BERNOUIN, valet to Cardinal Mazarin.
BERTAUDIÈRE No. 3, prison name of Philippe the Pretender.
BISCARRAT, GEORGES DE, officer of the King's Guards.
BLASOIS, servant of Athos.
BONSTETT, MEINHEER, Jesuit merchant of Bremen.
BRAGELONNE, RAOUL, VICOMTE DE, son of Athos.
BRETEUIL, colleague of Colbert.
BRIENNE, DE, secretary to Cardinal Mazarin.
BUCKINGHAM, GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF, of the English court.
CÉLESTIN, servant of Planchet.
CHALAIS, MLLE. DE, of the court.
CHARLES II., King of England.
CHÂTILLON, MLLE. DE, of the court.
CHEVREUSE, DUCHESSE DE, former confidante of Anne of Austria; also known as Marie Michon.
COLBERT, JEAN-BAPTISTE, successively bursar to Cardinal Mazarin, Intendant of Finance, and Prime Minister of France.
CONDÉ, LOUIS DE BOURBON, PRINCE DE, of the royal house.
CONRART, friend of Fouquet.
CRÉQUY, MLLE. DE, of the court.
CROPOLE, landlord of the Medici tavern.
CROPOLE, MME., wife of foregoing.
DANGEAU, of the court.

DANICAMP, servant of Fouquet.
D'ARTAGNAN, successively Lieutenant and Captain of the King's Musketeers, Count, and Marshal of France.
DESTOUCHES, aid to Colbert.
D'EYMERIS, farmer-general of revenue.
DIGBY, aid-de-camp to General Monk.
D'INFREVILLE, aid to Colbert.
D'ORLÉANS, GASTON, DUC, uncle of Louis XIV.
D'ORLÉANS, DUCHESSE, wife of foregoing.
D'ORLÉANS, PHILIPPE, DUC D'ANJOU ("Monsieur"), brother of Louis XIV.
D'ORLÉANS, DUCHESSE, HENRIETTA OF ENGLAND ("Madame"), wife of foregoing.
FAUCHEUX, goldsmith.
FORANT, aid to Colbert.
FOUQUET, NICOLAS, superintendent of finance.
FOUQUET, MME., wife of foregoing.
FOUQUET, ABBÉ, brother of Nicolas.
FRANÇOIS, servant of Baisemeaux.
FRIEDRICH, DE, officer of the Swiss Guards.
GECHTER, MME., housekeeper of Planchet.
GESVRES, DE, Captain of the King's Guards.
GÉTARD, architect.
GOENNEC, sailor.
GOURVILLE, friend of Fouquet.
GRAFFTON, Miss MARY, of the English court.
GRAMMONT, MARÉCHAL DE, of the court.
GRIMAUD, steward of Athos.
GRISART, Jesuit physician.
GUÉNAUD, physician to Mazarin.
GUICHE, COMTE DE, of the court.
HAVARD, colleague of Colbert.
HERREBIA, CARDINAL, Spanish Jesuit.
JUPENET, printer to Fouquet.
KÉROUALLE, LOUISE DE, afterwards Duchess of Portsmouth.
KEYSER, Dutch fisherman.
LAFAYETTE, MME. DE, of the court.
LA FONTAINE, JEAN DE, friend of Fouquet.
LAMBERT, English general.
LA MOLINA, Spanish nurse to Anne of Austria.
LA VALLIÈRE, MLLE. LOUISE DE LA BAUME LE BLANC DE, of the court.

Le Brun, painter to Fouquet.
Le Nôtre, architect to Fouquet.
Letellier, Michel, minister of France.
Loret, friend of Fouquet.
Lorraine, Chevalier de, favorite of Philippe d'Orléans.
Louis XIV., King of France.
Lyodot, farmer-general of revenue
Lyonne, minister of France.
MacCumnor, Scotch Jesuit.
Malicorne, friend of Manicamp.
Mancini, Mlle. Hortense de, niece of Cardinal Mazarin.
Mancini, Mlle. Marie de, niece of Cardinal Mazarin.
Mancini, Mlle. Olympe de, niece of Cardinal Mazarin.
Manicamp, friend of De Guiche.
Marchiali, prison name of Philippe the Pretender.
Maria Teresa, Queen of France.
Marin, colleague of Colbert.
Marini, Venetian Jesuit.
Mazarin, Giulio (Jules), Cardinal, Prime Minister of France.
Menneville, adventurer.
Molière, Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de, friend of Fouquet.
Monk, English general, afterwards Duke of Albemarle.
Montalais, Mlle. Aure de, of the court.
Montespan, De, of the court.
Motteville, Mme. de, of the court.
Mousqueton, or Mouston, steward of Porthos.
Navailles, Mme. de, of the court.
Norfolk, Duke of, English admiral.
Olivain, lackey to the Vicomte de Bragelonne.
Parry, servant of Charles II.
Pellisson, or Pélisson, friend of Fouquet.
Percerin, Jean, tailor to the King.
Philippe (known also as Bertaudière No. 3, Marchiali, and The Iron Mask), twin brother of Louis XIV., and Pretender to the throne of France.
Pittrino, painter to Cropole.
Planchet, former lackey to D'Artagnan; now grocer.
Porthos, successively Baron du Vallon, de Bracieux, de Pierrefonds.
Pressigny, Louis Constant de, captain of the King's frigate "La Pomone."

Rabaud, lackey to D'Artagnan.
Rochester, Wilmot, Earl of, of the English court.
Rose, secretary to Louis XIV.
Saint-Aignan, Comte de, favorite of Louis XIV.
Saint-Mars, De, Governor of Ile de Saint-Marguerite.
Saint-Rémy, De, steward to Gaston d'Orléans.
Saint-Rémy, Mme. de, wife of foregoing.
Seldon, prisoner of Bastille.
Soissons, Comtesse de, of the court.
Stewart, Miss, of the English court.
Toby, servant of Fouquet.
Tonnay-Charente, Mlle. Athenaïs de, afterwards Mme. de Montespan, of the court.
Valentinois, Mme. de, sister of De Guiche.
Valot, physician to Louis XIV.
Vanel, successively counsellor in Parliament and Procureur Général.
Vanel, Mme. Marguerite, wife of foregoing.
Vanin, farmer-general of revenue.
Vatel, steward to Fouquet.
Villeroy, De, of the court.
Wardes, Vicomte de, of the court.
Wostpur, Baron von, German Jesuit.
York, James, Duke of, brother of Charles II. of England.
Yves, sailor.

CONTENTS.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER.		PAGE
I.	The Letter	1
II.	The Messenger	9
III.	The Interview	17
IV.	Father and Son	25
V.	Which treats of Cropoli, Cropole, and a Great Unknown Painter	30
VI.	The Stranger	36
VII.	Parry	42
VIII.	How his Majesty Louis XIV. looked at Twenty-Two	48
IX.	In which the Incognito of the Stranger of the Hôtellerie des Médicis is revealed	58
X.	M. de Mazarin's Arithmetic	69
XI.	M. de Mazarin's Policy	77
XII.	The King and the Lieutenant	86
XIII.	Marie de Mancini	91
XIV.	In which Both the King and the Lieutenant show they have Good Memories	96
XV.	The Proscribed	106
XVI.	Remember!	111
XVII.	In which Aramis is sought and only Bazin found	122
XVIII.	In which D'Artagnan seeks Porthos and finds only Mousqueton	131
XIX.	What D'Artagnan came to Paris for,	138
XX.	Concerning the Partnership formed in the Rue des Lombards, at the Sign of the Pilon d'Or, for the working of M. d'Artagnan's Idea.	143

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
XXI.	Wherein D'Artagnan gets ready to travel for the House of Planchet and Company	153
XXII.	D'Artagnan travels for the House of Planchet and Company	160
XXIII.	In which the Author, in Spite of Himself, has to relate a Little History	167
XXIV.	The Treasure	179
XXV.	The Marsh	186
XXVI.	Heart and Mind	195
XXVII.	The Day After	204
XXVIII.	Contraband on Board	211
XXIX.	In which D'Artagnan begins to fear it will go hard with Planchet's Money and with his Own	218
XXX.	In which the Shares of Planchet and Company rise to Par	225
XXXI.	Monk drops the Mask	232
XXXII.	In which Athos and D'Artagnan meet again at Bedford's Staghorn Tavern	236
XXXIII.	The Audience	248
XXXIV.	Shows how Riches may be an Incumbrance	255
XXXV.	On the Canal	261
XXXVI.	How D'Artagnan, just as if he were a Fairy, drew a Summer Residence from a Deal Box	269
XXXVII.	How D'Artagnan made up the Debtor and Creditor Accounts of the Company	278
XXXVIII.	Wherein it is seen that even in the Seventeenth Century the French Grocer was a Personage not to be sneered at	284
XXXIX.	M. de Mazarin's Card-Party	290
XL.	An Affair of State	295
XLI.	The Narrative of Athos	300
XLII.	In which Mazarin becomes a Spendthrift!	305

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
XLIII.	Guénaud	310
XLIV.	Colbert	313
XLV.	A Rich Man's Confession	318
XLVI.	The Donation	324
XLVII.	How Anne of Austria advised Louis XIV. One Way, and how M. Fouquet advised him Another	329
XLVIII.	At Death's Door	337
XLIX.	Colbert's First Appearance	347
L.	The First Day of the King's Royalty	355
LI.	A Passion	359
LII.	D'Artagnan's Lesson	366
LIII.	The King	373
LIV.	M. Fouquet's Houses	391
LV.	The Abbé Fouquet	402
LVI.	M. de la Fontaine's Wine	409
LVII.	The Gallery of Saint-Mandé	413
LVIII.	The Epicureans	419
LIX.	Fifteen Minutes Late	424
LX.	The Plan of Battle	430
LXI.	The Tavern of the "Image de Notre-Dame"	435
LXII.	"Colbert Forever!"	443
LXIII.	The Diamond of M. d'Eymeris	450
LXIV.	The Notable Difference discovered by D'Artagnan between Monsieur and Monseigneur	458
LXV.	The Philosophy of the Heart and the Philosophy of the Head	465
LXVI.	The Journey	469
LXVII.	How D'Artagnan made the Acquaintance of a Poet who had insured the Publication of his Poems by becoming his own Printer	474
LXVIII.	D'Artagnan continues his Investigations	483
LXIX.	In which the Reader will doubtless be quite as Surprised as D'Artagnan was to come across an Old Acquaintance	491

CHAPTER.		PAGE.
LXX.	Wherein the Ideas of D'Artagnan, at first very much Involved, begin to Clear Up	498
LXXI.	A Procession at Vannes	506
LXXII.	Monseigneur the Bishop of Vannes	513
LXXIII.	In which Porthos is Sorry that he came with D'Artagnan	524
LXXIV.	In which D'Artagnan runs, Porthos snores, and Aramis counsels	536
LXXV.	In which Fouquet acts	542
LXXVI.	In which D'Artagnan finds his Captain's Commission	551
LXXVII.	A Lover and a Mistress	559
LXXVIII.	In which the Real Heroine of This Story appears at last	566
LXXIX.	Malicorne and Manicamp	573
LXXX.	Manicamp and Malicorne	578
LXXXI.	The Court-Yard of the Hôtel Grammont	586
LXXXII.	Madame's Portrait	595
LXXXIII.	At Havre	602
LXXXIV.	At Sea	608
LXXXV.	The Tents	615
LXXXVI.	Night	625
LXXXVII.	From Havre to Paris	630
LXXXVIII.	What the Chevalier de Lorraine thought of Madame	639
LXXXIX.	Mademoiselle de Montalais' Surprise	648
XC.	The Consent of Athos	658
XCI.	Monsieur is jealous of Buckingham	663
XCII.	Forever!	672
XCIII.	In which Louis XIV. does not consider Mademoiselle de la Vallière Rich enough or Pretty enough for a Nobleman of the Vicomte de Bragelonne's Station	679

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE LETTER.

At nine o'clock, on a certain morning toward the middle of May, in the year 1660, when the sun was already high enough in the heavens to drink up the dew on the carnations and gilly-flowers of the Castle of Blois, a small cavalcade, consisting of three men and two pages, returned to the city by the city bridge. The interest it excited among the loungers along the quay was but very slight, and was manifested, first, by a movement of the hand to the head as a salutation, and then by a movement of the tongue to express, in the purest French spoken in France, the following idea:

"So Monsieur is back from his hunting."

And this was all.

However, while the horses were climbing up the steep ascent that leads from the river to the castle, several shop-boys approached the last horse, from whose saddle-bows divers birds were suspended by the beak.

At sight of such sorry booty, these inquisitive individuals expressed the utmost scorn with all their rustic frankness, and, after discussing with one another the little profit to be derived from the sport of falconry, returned to their several occupations. One of them, however, a lusty, rollicking young blade, asked how it was that Monsieur, who was so enormously wealthy that he could have any amusement he liked, was yet content with such shabby recreation.

"Don't you know," answered one of his comrades, "that Monsieur finds his chief recreation in moping?"

Whereat the jolly youth shrugged his shoulders with a gesture that signified plainly: "In that case, I'd much rather be a nobody than be a prince;" and all resumed their labors.

Meanwhile, Monsieur proceeded on his way with an air of such blended melancholy and majesty that surely the admiration of the spectators must have been aroused if there had been spectators. But the honest townsfolk of Blois were anything but pleased with Monsieur for selecting their gay city as a place to mope in at his ease, and every time they caught a glimpse of this august but mopish personage, they slipped away with many a yawn, or drew in their heads from their windows, to avoid the soporific influence of that long, wan face, those watery eyes, and that dejected mien. Consequently, this good prince was pretty sure to find the streets deserted whenever he chanced to pass through them.

Now this behavior of the people of Blois showed a want of reverence that was really very culpable, for Monsieur was, after the King, aye, and even, perhaps, before the King, the greatest prince in the realm. In fact, God, who had bestowed on Louis XIV., then reigning, the good fortune of being the son of Louis XIII., had bestowed on Monsieur the honor of being the son of Henri IV. The city of Blois, therefore, felt, or at least ought to have felt, no small degree of pride in the thought that Gaston d'Orléans preferred it as a residence, and was now holding his court in its ancient legislative palace.

But wherever he happened to be, this great prince was fated to arouse only a very moderate degree of either admiration or attention on the part of the public, and to this lack of appreciation Monsieur had gradually grown accustomed.

Possibly this would account for his air of tranquil lassitude. Monsieur had been very busy during most of his life. A person who had allowed the heads of a dozen of his best friends to be cut off must have made considerable stir in the world. But as after the advent of Mazarin there was no more cutting off of heads, Monsieur was without any occupation, and his temperament was profoundly affected by such a condition of things.

The poor prince's life, then, was very sad. After his little hunting party in the morning in the neighborhood of the Beuvron or in the wood of Chiverny, Monsieur usually passed over the Loire, breakfasted at Chambord, with or without an appetite, and, until the next day appointed for a chase, the city of Blois heard no more of its sovereign lord and master.

And now that we have given an idea of the prince's ennui *extra muros*, if the reader is willing to accompany us along

with the cavalcade to the majestic portal of the Castle of the States we will describe the ennui that prevailed within them.

Monsieur was mounted on an easy-paced little horse, furnished with a broad saddle of red Flemish velvet and with stirrups shaped like buskins. The horse was fawn-colored; and as Monsieur's doublet and cloak of crimson velvet harmonized with the equipment of his steed, the vermilion hue of horse and rider was sufficient to distinguish the prince from his two companions, one of whom was garbed in violet, the other in green. The man on the left, in violet, was the equerry. The man on the right, in green, was the grand huntsman.

One of the pages bore two gerfalcons upon a perch; the other a hunting-horn, which he sounded languidly when within twenty yards of the castle. Every one who had anything to do with this languid prince did what he had to do languidly.

At this signal eight guardsmen, who were taking an airing in the square court-yard, ran for their halberds, and Monsieur made his solemn entrance into his castle.

When he was lost sight of under the porch, three or four young scapegraces, who were stationed on the mall behind the cavalcade and making disrespectful comments to one another on the suspended birds, took to their heels; when they were out of sight, street, square, and court-yard were all alike deserted.

Monsieur alighted without uttering a word, passed on to his apartments, where his valet-de-chambre changed his dress, and as Madame had not yet sent any one to take his orders with regard to breakfast, Monsieur lay down on a sofa, and was soon sleeping as soundly as if it had been eleven o'clock at night.

The eight guardsmen, knowing that their service for the day was now over, stretched themselves in the sun on the stone benches; the grooms led their horses into the stables, and, save that some merry birds among the gillyflower beds were trying to frighten one another with their shrill chirping, the entire castle was in as profound a sleep as Monseigneur himself.

Suddenly this soft, restful stillness was ruffled by a burst of laughter so loud and resonant that several of the halberdiers were disturbed in their slumbers, and opened an eye.

This noisy laughter proceeded from a casement in the castle, visited at this moment by the sun, which united the window to one of those large angles thrown on walls before noon by the outlines of chimneys.

The little balcony of wrought-iron in front of the window was adorned with a pot of carnations, another of primroses, and another containing an early rose-tree, whose magnificent green foliage was relieved by several red buds which gave promise of future roses.

In the room that the window lighted stood a square table covered with old Haarlem tapestry embroidered with huge flowers, and on the centre of this table was a long-necked vase of sandstone, holding irises and lilies. At each end of the table was a young girl.

The singular attitude of these youthful maidens made them look like two pupils who had just run away from their convent. One of them, with both her elbows resting on the table, was writing on a sheet of fine Holland paper; the other, kneeling on a chair, had stretched her head and bosom over the back and over the edge of the table, and was reading the words traced by her companion. Hence the cries and bantering, and peals of laughter, one of which reëchoed so loudly that it had scared the birds among the flowers, and disturbed the sleep of Monsieur's guards.

As we have already slightly hinted at the appearance presented by these young ladies, we shall, we hope, be forgiven if we present their portraits in fuller detail.

The young person leaning over the chair, who laughed so noisily, was a beautiful girl just out of her teens, with brown complexion, brown hair, glorious eyes that flashed from beneath strongly marked eyebrows, and teeth that gleamed like pearls behind lips of crimson coral. Her gait was so springy that it looked as if at every movement a mine must have exploded beneath her feet; she did not walk, she bounded.

The girl who was writing looked up at her friend with eyes as blue, as limpid, and pure as the skies on this particular day. Her hair, of a pale yellow, was arranged with exquisite taste and fell in silky clusters over her pearly cheeks; the hand that wandered over the paper was beautifully formed, but its thinness showed that she was still in her extreme youth. At every outburst of her companion's merriment her white shoulders rose in protest — smooth and velvety shoulders, but lacking that robustness and full moulding which were also unfortunately absent from her arms and hands.

"Montalais! Montalais!" she said at length, in a voice as sweet and caressing as a melody, "you laugh too loud, you

laugh like a man; not only will you attract the attention of the gentlemen of the guards, but you will not hear Madame's bell when Madame summons you."

The young girl addressed as Montalais continued to laugh and gesticulate, unmoved by this rebuke, and answered:

"Louise, you do not mean what you say, my dear; you know the gentlemen of the guards, as you style them, are now asleep, and that if you fired off a cannon you could not awake them; you know that Madame's bell is heard as far as the bridge of Blois, and that, consequently, I shall hear it when I am required to wait on her. What vexes you is that I laugh while you write, and what you dread is that your mother, Madame de Saint-Remy, may come up here, as she sometimes does when we laugh too much; you are afraid she may surprise us and see that big sheet of paper upon which you have written only two words during the last quarter of an hour: '*Monsieur Raoul.*' But you are right, my dear Louise, because after these words, '*Monsieur Raoul*,' there might follow several others of such a significant and incendiary character that your dear mother, Madame de Saint-Remy, would, very naturally, have a rod in pickle for you. Eh? am I not right? What have you to say to the contrary?"

And Montalais laughed louder and was more provoking than ever.

The fair young girl became now quite angry; she tore up the sheet upon which she had really traced the words '*Monsieur Raoul*' in a beautiful handwriting, and crushing the fragments in her trembling hands, threw them out of the window.

"Hey-day!" said Mademoiselle de Montalais, "so our little lamb, our little angel, our little dove, is in a passion! But don't be alarmed, Louise; Madame de Saint-Remy will not come, and if she did, you know what sharp ears I have. And besides, what more natural than to write to an old friend of twelve years' standing, especially when the letter begins with the words, '*Monsieur Raoul*'?"

"No matter; I will not write to him now," returned the young girl.

"Oh, indeed! and all to punish Montalais!" cried the teasing brunette, still laughing. "Nonsense! another sheet of paper, and our epistle will be finished in less than no time. There, now! Madame's bell, if you please! Well, let it ring. Madame

must wait, or, if not, she must do without her first maid of honor this morning."

A bell was actually ringing; it gave notice that Madame had finished her toilet and was waiting for Monsieur, who, after taking her hand, proceeded with the princess from the drawing-room into the dining-room.

This formality having been fulfilled most ceremoniously, the illustrious pair breakfasted and did not meet again until dinner, which occurred invariably at two o'clock.

When the bell sounded, a door in one of the pantries on the left of the court-yard opened, and two house-stewards issued forth, followed by eight scullions bearing a hand-barrow loaded with dishes under silver covers.

The house-steward who was first in rank silently touched with his wand one of the guards snoring on the benches; he was even so good-natured as to place in the hands of the sleepy man the halberd that stood near him against the wall; whereupon the soldier, with entire unconcern, escorted Monsieur's *viande* to the dining-room, preceded by a page and the two house-stewards.

Wherever the dishes passed, the sentries shouldered arms.

Mademoiselle de Montalais and her companion looked on from their window at all the details of this ceremonial, though they must have been pretty familiar with them. For that matter, however, their watchfulness was not due so much to their curiosity as to their desire to make sure that they should not be disturbed. And so, when scullions, guards, pages, and house-stewards had once passed, they returned to their table, and the sun, which had for a moment lit up those charming faces in the window-frame, now lit up nothing except the carnations, primroses, and rose-tree.

"Bah!" said Montalais, as she resumed her place, "Madame will breakfast without me."

"Oh, Montalais, you will be punished!" answered the other young girl, sitting down again.

"Punished? Oh, yes; deprived of a ride! The very sort of punishment I like! To take the air in a big coach, perched on the doorstep, and turn, now to the left, now to the right, along roads full of cart-ruts where you travel at the rate of a mile and a half an hour; then to return straight to the wing of the castle containing the window of Marie de Médicis, so that madame may have an opportunity — which she never

misses — of saying: 'Who would ever believe that Queen Marie escaped through it! — Forty-seven feet high! — The mother of two princes and three princesses!' — if that be an amusement, Louise, I hope to be punished every day, especially as my punishment would consist in having to stay with you and write letters as interesting as those we are now writing."

"Montalais! Montalais! you have certain duties to discharge."

"You speak quite at your ease, my dear, you who have entire freedom at court. You alone reap all the advantages of your residence here, and have to feel none of the discomforts; you are more of a maid of honor than I am, because Madame's affection for your father-in-law has been reflected on yourself; consequently, you enter this gloomy mansion, just as the birds enter that gloomy court-yard, inhaling the air, pecking at the flowers, nibbling at the berries, without having the slightest service to perform or the least vexation to suffer. And you talk, indeed, about 'certain duties to discharge'! Really, what duties have you to discharge, my pretty idler, except that of writing to Raoul? And as it seems you don't write to him, you are a little neglectful even of that duty."

Louise assumed an air of profound gravity; and, with her chin resting on her hand, replied in tones that denoted the utmost candor:

"You cavil at my superior fortune, do you? How can you have the heart to do so? You have a future; you belong to the court; when the King marries he will order Monsieur to live with him; you will take part in magnificent festivities, and will see the King, who is said to be so handsome and fascinating."

"And, along with that, I shall see Raoul, who is one of the prince's attendants," added Montalais, roguishly.

"Poor Raoul!" sighed Louise.

"Now is the time to write him, my dear; come, now, begin again inditing the two wonderful words '*Monsieur Raoul*,' which illuminated the top of the sheet you tore up."

Thereupon she handed her the pen, and, with a charming smile, guided her hand, which quickly traced the intended letters.

"What is to follow?" inquired the younger of the two girls.

"What is to follow? write whatever you have in your mind, Louise," answered Montalais.

"Are you sure there's something in my mind?"

"If there is n't some *thing*, there is some *person* in it, which amounts to the same, or rather, is much worse."

"You think so, Montalais?"

"Louise, Louise, your blue eyes are as deep as the sea I saw last year at Boulogne. No, I am mistaken; the sea is treacherous; your eyes are as deep as the azure up yonder — see, over our heads."

"Well, then, as you can so easily read what is in my eyes, tell me what I am thinking of, Montalais."

"In the first place, you are not thinking of '*Monsieur Raoul*,' but of '*My dear Raoul*.'"

"Oh!"

"Don't blush for so little. '*My dear Raoul*.' That's down. '*You entreat me to write to you at Paris, where you are staying, in the interests of Monsieur le Prince. As you must feel awfully bored, or else you would hardly turn to a mere girl of the province for amusement —*'"

Louise quickly raised her head.

"No, Montalais," she said, with a smile, "I do not think a word of that. Stay, this is what I think."

And boldly seizing the pen she wrote in a firm hand the following words:

"*I should have felt very unhappy if your request that I would remember you had been less fervently expressed. Everything here speaks of our early years; those years which fled so quickly and were yet so sweet during their flight that no years to come shall ever replace the joy which filled my heart.*"

Montalais, who watched the pen as it ran along, and read as her friend wrote, interrupted her at this point by clapping her hands.

"Nothing could be finer!" said she. "There's frankness for you! and the spirit of it! and the style! We 'll show these Parisians, my love, that Blois is the place for fine language!"

"He knows," answered the young girl, "that for me Blois has been paradise."

"Just what I meant, and you speak like an angel."

"Let me finish, Montalais."

And the young girl went on:

"You think of me, you say, Monsieur Raoul; I thank you for it; but when I remember how often our two hearts have beat in unison, I am not surprised."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Montalais, "you must be on your guard, my lamb; now you are shedding your wool and there are still wolves in Paris."

Just as Louise was about to reply, the gallop of a horse resounded under the porch of the castle.

"Who is it?" said Montalais, going to the window. "Upon my word, a handsome cavalier!"

"Oh! Raoul!" cried Louise, who had also approached the window, and turning quite pale, she dropped her head, in her excitement, on the unfinished letter.

"An adroit lover, upon my word!" cried Montalais; "he arrives just in the nick of time!"

"Go away, please, do go away, I entreat you!" murmured Louise.

"Nonsense! he does not know me. Pray let me see what brings him here."

CHAPTER II.

THE MESSENGER.

MADEMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS was right; the young cavalier was well worth looking at.

He was a young man between twenty-four and twenty-five, tall and slim, wearing gracefully the charming military costume of the period. His long, funnel-shaped boots contained a foot which Mademoiselle de Montalais might not have been ashamed of if she had cared to disguise herself as a man. With one of his delicate but sinewy hands he reined in his horse in the middle of the court-yard; with the other he lifted the plumed hat that shaded a face that was at once grave and artless.

The guards, awakened by the steps of the horse, started to their feet in a moment.

The young man, bending his head toward one of them, who

came up to his saddle-bow, said, in clear, distinct tones that could be heard perfectly through the window behind which the young ladies were hidden:

"A messenger for his royal Highness."

"Hol-lo! officer," shouted the guard; "a messenger!"

But the honest soldier was quite aware that no officer would appear, for the only one who could put in an appearance lived at the back of the castle, in a little suite of apartments overlooking the gardens. He immediately added, therefore:

"The officer, Monsieur, is making his rounds; but as he is absent, I will send some one to inform M. de Saint-Remy, the house-steward."

"M. de Saint-Remy?" repeated the cavalier, with a slight blush.

"You are acquainted with him?"

"Oh, yes. Be kind enough to inform him at once of my arrival, so that it may be announced to his royal Highness as early as possible."

"The matter appears to be urgent," said the guard, as if talking to himself, but with some hope of obtaining an answer.

The messenger nodded, in sign of assent.

"In that case," returned the guard, "I will go myself to the house-steward."

The young man alighted, and, while the other soldiers were watching eagerly every movement of the handsome steed ridden by him, their comrade returned, saying:

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but would you please give me your name?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne, on the part of his Highness M. le Prince de Condé."

The soldier made a profound bow, and, as if the very name of the conqueror of Rocroi and Lens had supplied him with wings. he ran lightly up the steps leading to the antechambers.

M. de Bragelonne had not had time to fasten his horse to one of the iron railings of this flight of steps, when M. de Saint-Remy hurried up to him, gasping, supporting his huge stomach with one hand, while with the other he cleaved the air as a fisherman clears the waters with an oar.

"Ah! M. le Vicomte, you at Blois!" he cried; "why, it is astonishing! good-day to you, M. Raoul, good-day."

"My best respects, M. de Saint-Remy."

"How happy Madame de Vall — I mean Madame de Saint-Remy will be to see you! But come along. His royal Highness is at breakfast; is it necessary to interrupt him? is the matter very serious?"

"Yes and no, M. de Saint-Remy. Still, the slightest delay might be the occasion of some vexation to his royal Highness."

"If that be the case, we must break through orders, M. le Vicomte. So come along. Besides, Monsieur to-day is in the best of temper. And then the news you bring is good, I hope?"

"It is very important, M. de Saint-Remy."

"And good, I presume?"

"Excellent."

"Come along at once, then," cried the simple-minded gentleman, arranging his dress as he jogged on.

Raoul followed, hat in hand, and somewhat scared at the noise made by his spurs on the floors of these immense halls.

As soon as he was lost sight of in the interior of the palace the window was again tenanted, and a series of excited whisperings betrayed the emotion of the young girls; they soon came to some resolution or other, for a head disappeared from the casement — the head of the brunette; the head that remained was hidden behind the balcony by the flowers, and gazed intently through the openings between the branches on the flight of steps by which M. de Bragelonne had entered the palace.

Meanwhile the object of this eager curiosity went on his way, preceded by the house-steward; and soon the noise of hurried footsteps, the flavor of wines and meats, and the clinking of crystal goblets and silver plate gave him due notice that he was at the end of his course.

The pages, valets, and other officials assembled in the office behind the dining-room received the newcomer with the politeness for which the country is proverbial; some of them were already acquainted with Raoul, and almost all knew that he came from Paris. His arrival, in fact, nearly brought the service to a standstill for a time. Indeed, a page who was filling the goblet of his Highness, on hearing the jingling of spurs in the next apartment turned round in boyish fashion,

utterly oblivious of the fact that he continued to pour out the wine, not into the prince's glass, but on the cloth.

Madame, who, unlike her glorious spouse, had her wits about her, noticed the page's absence of mind.

"Well, really!" she exclaimed.

"Well, really!" repeated Monsieur; "what is the matter, pray?"

M. de Saint-Remy, who had thrust in his head through the door, took advantage of the moment.

"Why should I be disturbed in this way?" said Gaston, helping himself to a thick slice of one of the biggest salmon that ever swam up the Loire in order to be caught between Paimboeuf and Saint-Nazaire.

"A messenger has arrived from Paris. Oh, after breakfast, Monseigneur, there is plenty of time."

"From Paris!" cried the prince, dropping his fork; "a messenger from Paris, you say? And from whom does the messenger come?"

"From M. le Prince," the house-steward added quickly.

Our readers are aware, of course, that "M. le Prince" was the title of M. de Condé.

"A messenger from M. le Prince!" said Gaston, with an uneasiness that escaped none of those present, thereby increasing the general curiosity.

Monsieur thought, perhaps, that he was back once more in that era of blissful plots, when the opening of a door gave him a shock, when every letter might contain a state secret, and every message was intended to further a dark and complicated intrigue. Perhaps, too, the great name of Condé loomed up before him in this palace of Blois like some gigantic phantom.

Monsieur pushed back his plate.

"Shall I tell the messenger to wait?" asked M. de Saint-Remy.

A glance from Madame encouraged Gaston, and he answered:

"No, on the contrary, show him in at once. By the way, who is he?"

"A gentleman of this province, M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"Ah, indeed! Very well, introduce M. de Bragelonne, introduce him."

And when he had uttered these words, with his customary solemnity, Monsieur looked, in a way peculiar to him, at the persons in attendance, and all — pages, officers, and equerries — abandoned napkin, knife, and goblet, and made a rapid and disorderly retreat into one of the next apartments.

After this little army had filed out, Raoul de Bragelonne, preceded by M. de Saint-Remy, entered the dining-room.

The few moments taken up by this retreat gave time to Monseigneur to assume a diplomatic air. He did not turn round, but waited until the house-steward conducted the messenger before him.

Raoul halted at the lower end of the table in a position that placed him between Monsieur and Madame. After a very profound inclination to Monsieur and a very humble one to Madame, he drew himself up to his full height, and waited till Monsieur addressed him.

The prince, on the other hand, was waiting until all the doors were hermetically closed. He would not turn round to see if they were — that would be beneath his dignity ; but he listened intently for the turning of the keys in the locks ; this would promise him at least an appearance of secrecy.

As soon as the doors were locked, Monsieur raised his eyes to the vicomte and said :

" So you come from Paris, monsieur ? "

" This minute, Monseigneur."

" How is the King ? "

" His Majesty is in perfect health, Monseigneur."

" And my sister-in-law ? "

" Her Majesty the queen mother still suffers from her lungs, but she has been somewhat better during the last month."

" I was told by some one that you came from M. le Prince. Surely that must be a mistake ? "

" No, Monseigneur. M. le Prince ordered me to hand you this letter, and I am to wait for an answer."

Raoul had been somewhat embarrassed by this cold and guarded reception, and his voice had unconsciously sunk to a lower key.

The prince was unaware that he himself was the cause of this mysterious demeanor and became frightened.

His eyes had a haggard appearance as he took the letter of Condé ; he broke the seals in the manner in which he would

have broken the seals of a suspicious-looking package, and, in order that no one might notice the effect of its perusal on his features, he turned round.

Madame followed, with an anxiety almost equal to that of the prince, every movement of her august spouse.

Raoul, now quite collected, and feeling that the absorption of his hosts in their own affairs gave him a little liberty, was looking from where he was standing through an open window at the gardens and the statues that peopled them.

"Why," exclaimed Monsieur, suddenly and with a radiant smile, "what a pleasant surprise, and what a charming letter from M. le Prince! Read it, Madame."

The table was too wide for the arm of the prince to reach the hand of the princess. Raoul sprang forward, took the letter, and handed it to the princess with a grace that charmed her and won a flattering expression of approval.

"You know the contents of this letter, I suppose?" said Gaston to Raoul.

"Yes, Monseigneur; M. le Prince gave his message verbally at first, but, after reflecting awhile, he wrote it down."

"And he writes a beautiful hand; still, I cannot make it out," said Madame.

"Be kind enough to read it for Madame, M. de Bragelonne," said the duke.

"Yes, please read it, monsieur."

Raoul began reading, and Monsieur again paid the closest attention to the letter.

The letter was in the following terms: —

"*Monseigneur:*

"*The King has started for the frontier. You have, no doubt, already learned that his Majesty will soon be married. The King did me the honor to appoint me quarter-master for this journey, and, as I know the pleasure it will give his Majesty to spend a day at Blois, I have ventured to ask your royal Highness for permission to take up our quarters in your castle. If, however, the suddenness of this request should in any way embarrass your royal Highness, I entreat you to inform me of the fact by the messenger whom I send you, M. de Bragelonne, one of my gentlemen. Then, instead of going by Blois, I will change the route and go either by Vendôme or Romorantin. I venture to hope that your royal High*

ness will look favorably on my request; it is the expression of my entire devotion and of my wish to please you."

"Nothing could be more gracious," said Madame, who during the reading of the letter had more than once read her husband's thoughts in his eyes. "The King here!" cried she, in tones a little too loud, perhaps, to ensure the necessary secrecy.

"Monsieur," said his Highness, in his turn, "you will thank M. le Prince de Condé, and express all the gratitude I feel for the favor he is about to do me."

Raoul bowed.

"What day does his Majesty arrive?" continued the prince.

"The King, Monseigneur, will very probably arrive this evening."

"Then, supposing my answer had been in the negative, how could it have been known in time?"

"I was enjoined in that case, Monseigneur, to return with all speed to Beaugency and give counter-orders to the courier, and the courier was to return with counter-orders for M. le Prince."

"So his Majesty is at Orleans?"

"Nearer, Monseigneur; his Majesty ought to be now at Meung."

"Does the court accompany him?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"By the way, I was forgetting to ask about M. le Cardinal."

"His Eminence is apparently in good health, Monseigneur."

"His nieces are with him, I presume?"

"No, Monseigneur; his Eminence has ordered the Mesdemoiselles de Mancini to proceed to Brouage. They follow the left bank of the Loire, the court the right."

"What! Mademoiselle Marie de Mancini leave the court too!" exclaimed the prince, whose coolness was beginning to thaw.

"Mademoiselle Marie de Mancini especially," answered Raoul, discreetly.

A fleeting smile, the evanescent vestige of his clumsy intrigues, lit up for a moment the pale features of the prince.

"Thanks, M. de Bragelonne," said he. "I am afraid you might not care to inform the prince of another commission I

should like to give you, namely, to tell him that I have been highly pleased with his messenger; but I can do that myself."

Raoul bowed his thanks for the honor Monsieur did him.

Monsieur made a sign to Madame, who struck a bell on her right.

M. de Saint-Remy immediately entered and was followed by a crowd of others, who soon filled the room.

"Gentlemen," said the prince, "his Majesty will honor me by passing a day at Blois, and I am sure the King, my nephew, will have no reason to regret the favor he is about to confer on my house."

"Long live the King!" cried all the officers on duty, and M. de Saint-Remy louder than the rest.

Gaston hung his head, gloomy and dejected. Almost during his whole life he had been forced to hear or, rather, to endure that cry, "Long live the King!" a cry that passed over his head. For a time, however, he had not heard it, and his ears had some repose, but now before him stood a royalty more youthful, strenuous, and brilliant than any previous royalty; it was a fresh outrage more painful than those he had already suffered.

Madame comprehended the pangs of that timid and unstable heart. She rose from table; Monsieur did the same, mechanically, and all the servitors, with a buzzing like that of many hives, surrounded Raoul, evidently to question him.

Seeing which, Madame summoned M. de Saint-Remy.

"This is not a time for gossip, but for work," said she, in the tone of an angry housewife.

M. de Saint-Remy immediately broke up the circle formed around Raoul, and he was able to escape into the antechamber.

"You will take good care of this gentleman, I hope," Madame added, addressing M. de Saint-Remy.

The worthy official at once trotted up to Raoul.

"Madame has ordered us to see to it that you have some refreshments," said he; "apartments will also be provided for you in the castle."

"Thanks, M. de Saint-Remy," answered Bragelonne; "you know how anxious I am to wait upon my father, M. le Comte."

"Of course, of course, M. Raoul; be kind enough to present my very humble respects to him at the same time."

Raoul managed to get rid of the old gentleman and proceeded on his way.

As he was leading his horse through the porch by the bridle, a low voice reached him from the back of a dark alley.

"M. Raoul!" said the voice.

The young man turned round in amazement, and saw a dark-complexioned girl, who laid a finger on her lips and held out her hand.

The young girl was a stranger to him.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTERVIEW.

Raoul advanced a step in response to the young girl's call.

"But my horse, madame?" he inquired.

"You are easily embarrassed, upon my word! If you go into the outer court-yard you 'll find a shed; fasten your horse in it and return quickly."

"Madame, I obey."

Raoul's appointed task was finished in less than four minutes; he came back to the little door, and there, in the dim light, he saw his mysterious guide waiting for him on the first steps of a winding staircase.

"Art brave enough to follow me, O valiant knight-errant?" said she, laughing at the slight hesitation exhibited by Raoul.

His reply was to spring up the gloomy staircase behind her. In this fashion they came to the third story, he still behind, touching with his hands, when he tried to grasp the baluster, a silk gown, which extended the entire width of the stairs. Whenever Raoul made a false step his fair guide uttered a reproachful "*Hush!*" and offered him a soft, perfumed hand.

"I could climb up to the castle donjon under such guidance and not feel a particle of fatigue," said Raoul.

"Which means, monsieur, you are very much puzzled, very tired, and very uncomfortable; but don't be alarmed, we are at our journey's end."

The young girl pushed a door open, and without any warning the landing was immediately filled with a flood of light,

and Raoul appeared, holding on to the balustrade at the top of the stairs.

The young girl still went on; he followed her; and when she entered a room, he entered the room, too.

Just when he was caught in this trap, he heard a loud cry; he turned round, and saw within two yards of him, her hands clasped and her eyes closed, the lovely blond young girl with the blue eyes and pearly shoulders who had recognized him and called him Raoul.

As soon as he perceived her, he beheld so much love and happiness in the expression of her eyes that he dropped on his knees in the middle of the room, murmuring the word, "Louise!"

"Ah! Montalais! Montalais!" she sighed, "it is a great sin for you to play such a trick on me."

"I play a trick on you!"

"Yes, you told me you were going down for news, and then you bring this gentleman up here!"

"I had to do it. How else was he to get the letter you wrote to him?"

And she pointed to the letter, which was still on the table. Raoul stepped forward for the purpose of seizing it; Louise, however, was quicker, and reached out her hand to stop him, although, before her advance, she manifested a hesitation that was rather noticeable. Raoul then came in contact with this warm and trembling hand; he took it in both of his own, and, raising it to his lips, kissed it so reverentially that the kiss was like a sigh.

While this was going on, Mademoiselle de Montalais had taken and carefully folded the letter in three folds, as was the fashion with women, and slipped it into her bosom.

"Have no fear, Louise," said she. "The young gentleman is as unlikely to abstract it from its present hiding-place as was our defunct liege, Louis XIII., to remove a somewhat similar document from the bodice of Mademoiselle de Hautefort."

The young girls smiled, which made Raoul blush so that he forgot to remark that the hand of Louise still remained between his own.

"There now!" said Montalais, "you have forgiven me, Louise, for introducing M. de Bragelonne, and you, monsieur, are no longer set against me because I introduced you to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. So now that we are at

peace let us talk like old friends. Louise, introduce me to M. de Bragelonne."

"M. le Vicomte," said Louise, with her placid grace and frank smile, "I have the honor to introduce to you Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, maid of honor to her royal Highness, Madame, and, moreover, my friend, my most excellent friend."

Raoul made a ceremonious inclination.

"And will you not also," said he, "introduce me to the lady, Louise?"

"Oh, she knows you already! she knows all!"

At which artless words Montalais laughed, and Raoul heaved a blissful sigh, for he interpreted them thus: "She knows all — *our love.*"

"And now that we are through with the necessary formalities, M. le Vicomte," said Montalais, "pray take a chair and tell us quickly all the news you have brought with you."

"Mademoiselle, the news is no longer a secret. The King will stop, on his way to Poitiers, at Blois, for the purpose of visiting his royal Highness."

"The King here!" cried Montalais, clapping her hands. "We 'll see the court! Just only think of it, Louise! the *real* court! the court of Paris! Gracious goodness! But when is this to be, monsieur?"

"This evening, perhaps, mademoiselle; to-morrow, certainly."

Montalais made a gesture of despair.

"And I have n't a thing to wear! and no time to have a gown made! We are as much behind the times here as if we were Polanders! We are sure to resemble the portraits of the age of Henri IV. Ah! monsieur, how could you have the heart to be the bearer of such evil tidings?"

"But, ladies, you are sure to be beautiful, no matter what you wear."

"Don't be stupid, please. Of course we are sure to be beautiful, because nature has made us — well, passable; but we are sure to be ridiculous, because fashion will have entirely forgotten us. Alas, ridiculous! They will regard *me* as a ridiculous person — ME!"

"But who are 'they'?" asked Louise, innocently.

"Who are 'they'? What an odd creature you are, my darling, to ask such a question. '*They*' means everybody;

'*they*' means the courtiers; '*they*' means the lords; '*they*' means the King!"

"Excuse me, my dear, but as every one here is accustomed to seeing us as we are —"

"Granted; but all that will change now, and we shall be ridiculous, even in Blois; for we're going to have the fashions from Paris staring us in the face, and it will be plain to be seen that we are in the fashion of Blois. It's heartbreaking!"

"Don't give way, mademoiselle."

"Well, after all," said Montalais, with an abrupt, but philosophical turn, "so much the worse for those who do not find me to their taste!"

"They would be rather hard to please," replied Raoul, faithful to his system of uniform gallantry.

"Thanks, M. le Vicomte. We were saying, were we not, that the King is coming to Blois?"

"With his entire court."

"Including the Mesdemoiselles de Mancini?"

"No, certainly not."

"But as it is said the King cannot keep away from Mademoiselle Marie de Mancini —"

"Mademoiselle, the King will have to keep away from her. M. le Cardinal insisted on this and banished his nieces to Brouage."

"He? — oh! the hypocrite!"

"Hush!" said Louise, pressing a finger on her friend's rosy lips.

"Pshaw! no one can hear me. I say old Mazarino Mazarini is a hypocrite and wild to make his neice Queen of France."

"Oh, no, mademoiselle. On the contrary, the cardinal has arranged a marriage between his Majesty and the Infanta Maria Teresa."

Montalais looked Raoul full in the face and said:

"And you Parisians believe in such stories? Well, we're not so simple-minded in Blois."

"Mademoiselle, when the King presses forward beyond Poitiers and starts on the road to Spain you will surely come to the conclusion that all this has some meaning, especially as the articles of the marriage contract have been signed by Don Luis de Haro and his Eminence."

"Indeed! but the King is the King, I presume?"

"Undoubtedly, mademoiselle; but then the cardinal is the cardinal."

"But is not the King a man? Is he not in love with Marie de Mancini?"

"He adores her."

"Good! He will marry her, then; we'll have a war with Spain. Monsieur Mazarin will spend some of the millions he has been saving up; our young gentlemen will fight like heroes against the haughty Castilians, and many of them will come back to us crowned with laurels, and we shall crown them with myrtle. That is the way to conduct affairs of state, in my judgment."

"Montalais, you are crazy," said Louise, "and whatever is extravagant has the same attraction for you that the flame has for the moth."

"Louise, I am afraid you are too sensible ever to fall in love."

"Oh!" returned Louise, in a tone of fond reproach, "do you not understand, Montalais? The queen mother wishes to marry her son to the Infanta; would you have the King disobey his mother? Could a prince with a heart so loyal as his disobey his mother? When parents frown on our love we must banish love!"

And Louise sighed, Raoul cast down his eyes as if embarrassed, and Montalais burst out laughing.

"So far as I am concerned, I have no parents," said she.

"You have had news of the health of M. le Comte de la Fère?" inquired Louise, the question having apparently some connection with that heavy sigh, which was in itself an eloquent revelation of a profound sorrow.

"No, mademoiselle," answered Raoul, "I have not yet paid a visit to my father; I was just starting for his house when Mademoiselle de Montalais did me the favor to stop me. I hope that M. le Comte is well. You have not heard anything to the contrary, have you?"

"Nothing, M. Raoul; nothing, thank God!"

Then they were silent; but their silence was of that kind in which two souls, pursuing the same idea, manage to have a perfect understanding without the aid of a single look even.

"Good heavens!" cried Montalais, suddenly, "some one is coming up the stairs!"

"Who can it be?" said Louise, rising in alarm.

"Mesdemoiselles, I am afraid I have been the occasion of some annoyance to you; doubtless I have been very imprudent," stammered Raoul, who was feeling very ill at ease.

"It is a heavy step," said Louise.

"Ah, if it is only M. Malicorne," replied Montalais, "we need not be at all concerned."

Louise and Raoul interchanged a look that asked who was this M. Malicorne.

"Don't get frightened," continued Montalais, "he is not jealous."

"But, mademoiselle —" said Raoul.

"I understand. Well, he is as prudent as I am myself."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Louise, who had applied her ear to the half-open door, "it is my mother's step!"

"Madame de Saint-Remy! Where can I hide?" cried Raoul, catching at the dress of Montalais, who had seemingly lost her head.

"Yes," said she, "yes; I recognize also the click-clack of her pattens. It is our worthy mother. M. le Vicomte, it is a great pity that the window opens on a stone pavement, and a pavement fifty feet below us, at that."

Raoul glanced at the balcony, a wild look in his eyes; Louise seized him by the arm and held him back.

"Well, really, I must be losing my senses!" cried Montalais, "not to think of the closet in which the ceremonial costumes are kept! Why, it was made for such an occasion as the present."

It was time. Madame de Saint-Remy was coming up faster than usual. She was on the landing just at the very moment when Montalais, as in all dramatic surprises, was shutting the closet by backing against the door.

"Ah!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy; "so you are here, Louise?"

"Yes, madame," she answered, paler than if she had been convicted of a great crime.

"That is fortunate."

"Pray be seated, madame," said Montalais, offering a chair to Madame de Saint-Remy, and so placing it that the back was turned to the closet.

"Thanks, Mademoiselle Aure, thanks; come away, my child, let us go at once."

"Go where, madame?"

"Why, to our apartments, of course; have you not to dress yourself for the occasion?"

"I don't understand," said Montalais, pretending to be taken by surprise, for she was terribly afraid that Louise would commit some blunder.

"Have you not heard the news?" asked Madame de Saint-Remy.

"What news, madame, could two girls hear in this dovecot?"

"What! Then you have met nobody?"

"Madame, you speak in riddles and are torturing us to death!" cried Montalais, who was scared by the increasing pallor of Louise and did not know which way to turn.

Then she saw a look on her companion's face that was pregnant with meaning, a look that would make its significance plain even to a stone wall. Louise nodded in the direction of the hat, Raoul's unlucky hat, ostentatiously perched on the table.

Montalais threw herself in front, and seizing it with her left hand, passed it behind her back into her right, speaking all the time while she was trying to conceal it.

"Well, a courier has arrived with the news that the King is about to visit us. So, young ladies, you must make yourselves as beautiful as you can."

"Quick, quick!" exclaimed Montalais, "follow your mother, Louise, and give me time to put my ceremonial attire in order."

Louise rose; her mother took her by the hand and hurried her out on the landing.

"Come," said she.

And, in an undertone:

"Why do you visit Montalais when I have forbidden you to do so?"

"She is my friend, madame. Besides, I have but just come."

"Did she attempt to conceal any person while you were there?"

"Madame!"

"I saw a man's hat, I tell you; it belonged to that scapegrace, that rascal" —

"Madame!" cried Louise.

"That lazy miscreant, Malicorne! A maid of honor to keep company with such a fellow — shame!"

And then the voices died away in the depths of the narrow staircase.

Montalais did not lose a single word of this conversation, which echoed in her ears as if it came through a funnel.

She shrugged her shoulders, and on seeing that Raoul, who had left his hiding-place, had heard also :

"Poor Montalais!" said she, "the victim of friendship — poor Malicorne, the victim of love!"

She paused, though, when she beheld the tragi-comic face of Raoul, who was dismayed at the thought of having discovered so many secrets in a single day.

"Oh!" exclaimed he, "can I ever compensate you, mademoiselle, for your kindness?"

"We shall settle our accounts some time or other," she answered. "At present you must take to your heels, M. de Bragelonne, for Madame de Saint-Remy is by no means lenient, and, if she tattle, we may have a domiciliary visit — which would be an unpleasant incident for all parties, I assure you. Good-bye!"

"But Louise — how is she to learn —"

"Oh, go away. You need n't be uneasy. Louis XI. knew perfectly well what he was doing when he invented the post-office."

"Alas!" sighed Raoul.

"And am I not here — I, who am worth all the post-offices in the kingdom? To your horse, then, at once! I do not care to have Madame de Saint-Remy find you here if she come back to lecture me."

"And she would tell my father, too, would she not?" murmured Raoul.

"And you would get a nice scolding! Ah! vicomte, it's easy seeing you are from court; you are as great a coward as the King. Pooh-pooh! at Blois we manage to get along without the consent of papa better than you folk! Ask Malicorne."

And thereupon the madcap girl thrust Raoul out of the door by the shoulders. He ran downstairs, passed through the porch, found his horse, jumped into the saddle, and galloped as hard as if the eight guardsmen were hard upon his heels.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND SON.

Raoul followed the well-known road, so dear to his memory, that led from Blois to the house of the Comte de la Fère.

The reader will pardon us for not describing this mansion anew. He has been with us there before, and is well acquainted with it. But since our last visit the walls have taken on a grayer tinge, and the coppery tones of the brick are more harmonious ; the trees have grown higher, and some of them, whose slender limbs barely overtopped the hedges, have now flung out afar their enlarged and luxuriantly tufted branches, swollen with sap, covered with fruit and flowers, and sheltering the wanderer beneath their deep and massive shade.

Raoul perceived in the distance the pointed roof, the two little turrets, the dovecot among the elms, and the pigeons flying and wheeling around the cone of brick unceasingly, never abandoning it for a moment, like the sweet thoughts that flutter around a calm, unruffled soul.

When he drew nearer, he heard the noise of the pulleys as they clanked under the weight of the heavy buckets. He fancied that he also heard the melancholy groaning of the water as it fell back into the well, that sad, dismal, solemn sound, which strikes on the ears of those twin dreamers, the child and the poet, — a sound the English call *splash*, the Arabian poets *gasgachaw*, and which we Frenchmen, who would like to be poets, can only translate by a paraphrase : *The noise of water falling into water.*

A year had now elapsed since Raoul had come to see his father. He had spent the whole of this year in the household of M. le Prince.

For in fact M. de Condé, after taking part in all the agitations of the Fronde, — the first period of which we have already tried to depict, — had become publicly, frankly, and solemnly reconciled with the court. While the rupture between M. le Prince and the King had lasted, M. le Prince, who had long entertained a liking for M. de Bragelonne, vainly offered him those advantages which are calculated to dazzle a young man. The Comte de la Fère, ever faithful to his princi-

ples of loyalty and royalty, principles that had been developed by him on a certain day in the vaults of Saint-Denis, in the presence of his son, had always refused them in the name of his son. But the vicomte went further than this: instead of joining M. le Condé in his rebellion, he joined M. de Turenne and fought for the King. Then, when M. de Turenne had also apparently forsaken the royal cause, he abandoned M. de Turenne, as he had abandoned M. de Condé. The result of this invariable line of conduct was that, as Turenne had never conquered Condé, or Condé Turenne except under the banner of the King, Raoul, young as he was, had ten victories to his credit on his roll of service, and not a single defeat to wound his valor and his conscience.

Raoul, then, according to his father's wish, had been the stubborn and unchangeable servant of Louis XIV.'s fortunes, despite all the levity and backsliding which were endemic, nay, almost inevitable at the time.

Once restored to favor, M. de Condé had taken advantage of the privileges granted him by his amnesty, and had asked for many of the things which had previously been accorded to him, and, among other things, for Raoul; and M. de la Fère, with his unfailing sagacity, had sent Raoul back to the Prince de Condé.

A year, then, had slipped by since the last separation of father and son; a few letters had assuaged but not healed the sorrow occasioned by the latter's absence. We have already seen that Raoul had left behind him at Blois another love that was not filial.

But let us do him this justice: Had not chance and Mademoiselle de Montalais — tempting demons both of them — been in the way, Raoul after delivering his message would have dashed off immediately on the road to his father's house, now and then giving a look behind, perhaps, but never once halting, even though he knew the arms of Louise were stretched out to recall him.

Consequently the first half of the journey was devoted to regretful thoughts of that past he had abandoned so abruptly — the past meaning his lady-love; the other half to the friend he was so impatient to meet that his wishes outstripped the speed of his horse.

Raoul found the garden gate open; he tore along the avenue, unmindful of two long arms which an old man in a blue,

woolen jacket and a wide, threadbare velvet cap shook at him angrily and violently.

This old man, who was weeding a bed of dwarf rose-trees and daisies with his fingers, was highly indignant at seeing a horse take such liberties with his sanded and carefully raked pathways.

He even ventured on a forcible "Hollo!" and then the rider turned round. The scene changed at once: as soon as the old man saw Raoul's face, he straightened himself out and ran toward the house, occasionally uttering growls, his method, apparently, of giving vent to his uncontrollable delight.

Raoul reached the stables, handed his horse over to a small lackey, and sprang up the flight of steps with an ardor that ought to have delighted his father's heart.

He crossed the antechamber, dining and drawing rooms, but encountered nobody; at length he came to the door of M. de la Fère's study, knocked impatiently, and entered, almost without hearing the word "Enter!" which the soft yet grave voice of his father had pronounced.

The count was seated before a table covered with paper and books; he was still the handsome, noble gentleman of other days, but time had given to his beauty and nobility a more solemn and distinctive character. A white, unwrinkled brow beneath hair more white than black; mild yet piercing eyes beneath lashes that were still youthful; a silky moustache, just beginning to get grizzled, surmounting delicately modelled lips, lips that looked as if no human passion had ever made them quiver; a figure straight and supple, and hands that were faultless but rather thin — such was the picture now presented by the illustrious gentleman whose name had been a theme for eulogy in so many illustrious mouths when he was known as Athos. He was busy revising the pages of a manuscript written entirely by his own hand.

Raoul fell on his father's neck and shoulders, and kissed him so tenderly, so rapidly, that the count had neither time nor strength to escape from his son's embraces and get the better of his own paternal emotions.

"You here, Raoul! you here!" said he. "Is it really possible?"

"Oh! monsieur, monsieur, how glad I am to see you again!"

"But you do not answer, vicomte. Have you permission to come to Blois, or has any unfortunate event happened in Paris?"

"Thank God, monsieur," answered Raoul, who was gradually regaining his composure, "nothing has happened except what is fortunate. The King is about to marry, as I had the honor of informing you in my last letter, and has started for Spain, taking in Blois on the way."

"Because he wishes to visit Monsieur?"

"Yes, M. le Comte. And so M. le Prince, being afraid that his royal Highness might be caught unprepared, or wishing to give a signal proof of his desire to please him, commissioned me to see to it that the lodgings were ready beforehand."

"You saw Monsieur?" asked the count, quickly.

"I had that honor."

"In the castle?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Raoul, lowering his eyes, because doubtless he felt there was something more than curiosity at the bottom of the question.

"Ah! indeed! Allow me, vicomte, to offer you my congratulations."

Raoul bowed.

"But you saw some one else at Blois?"

"Monsieur, I saw her royal Highness, Madame."

"Very well. However, I am not speaking of Madame."

Raoul turned crimson, but did not answer.

"Apparently you do not understand me, M. le Vicomte?" continued M. de la Fère, not emphasizing his words more forcibly, but allowing an expression of severity to appear in his eyes.

"I understand you perfectly, monsieur," answered Raoul, "and if I am considering my answer, it is not because I am searching for a falsehood — you know that well, monsieur."

"I know that you never lie, and, therefore, it surprises me that you should take up so much time in finding a 'yes' or a 'no.'"

"I cannot answer unless I have a clear idea of what you mean, and, if I have, I am afraid my words will not please you; for I have no doubt you will be surprised when I tell you I have seen —"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes, I knew well it was to her you alluded, M. le Comte," said Raoul, with ineffable sweetness.

"And I have asked whether you saw her."

"Monsieur, I was absolutely unaware, when I entered the

castle, that Mademoiselle de la Vallière was in it. It was only as I was returning after discharging my commission that a mere chance brought us face to face. Then I did myself the honor to pay her my respects."

"Would you oblige me by naming the chance that brought you and Mademoiselle de la Vallière together?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais, monsieur."

"Who is Mademoiselle de Montalais?"

"A young lady I do not know and never saw before. She is maid of honor to Madame."

"M. le Vicomte, I will not trouble you with any further questions, and, indeed, I regret that I have already troubled you with so many. I recommended you to avoid seeing Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and not to visit her except with my consent. Oh, I am perfectly well aware you have spoken the truth and have done nothing to bring about a meeting with her. I have to blame chance and not you for the injury inflicted on me. I will rest content, therefore, with what I have already said to you concerning this lady. God is my witness that I do not find fault with her in any respect. But it does not enter into my plans that you should frequent her place of residence. I must once more, then, request you, Raoul, to consider this as settled."

It was easy to read in Raoul's clear, pure eyes the pain these words caused him.

"And now, my son," continued the count, with his sweet smile and in his usual tones, "let us talk of something else. Perhaps, however, you have to return to your duties?"

"No, monsieur, I can stay with you to-day. Fortunately M. le Prince has assigned me no duty except one which is entirely consonant with my wishes."

"Is the King well?"

"Perfectly."

"And M. le Prince also?"

"In his usual health, monsieur."

The count did not ask after Mazarin; it was an old habit of his.

"Well, then, Raoul, as you belong to me for the day, I will give mine entirely up to you. Embrace me again — another — consider yourself at home, vicomte. Ah! our old friend Grimaud! Come here, Grimaud, M. le Vicomte wants to embrace you too."

The tall old man did not wait for a second invitation; he ran up with open arms. Raoul spared him the half of the journey.

"And now, how would you like if we passed into the garden, Raoul? I will show you the new apartments I got ready for your occupation during your holidays, and while examining the winter plantations and two new saddle-horses, you will give me news of our friends in Paris."

The count locked up his manuscript, took the young man's arm, and drew him into the garden.

Grimaud looked rather dismal when Raoul departed. When he perceived that his head almost touched the cross-bar of the gate he uttered just one significant word while stroking his white beard:

"Grown!"

CHAPTER V.

WHICH TREATS OF CROPOLI, CROPOLE, AND A GREAT UNKNOWN PAINTER.

While the Comte de la Fère is taking Raoul to visit the new buildings he has had erected and the new horses he has purchased, we must ask our readers to allow us to lead them back to Blois and make them acquainted with the unusual excitement that has stirred up the city.

It was in the hotels especially that the results of the intelligence of which Raoul had been the bearer produced the strongest impression.

In fact, the coming of the King to Blois meant the coming of a hundred horsemen, ten carriages, two hundred horses, and as many lackeys as masters. Where was all this multitude to be stowed away? Then, how were all the gentlemen of the neighborhood to be lodged? They were likely to flock to the city in two or three hours, when the news had widened its circle of propagation, like the increasing circles produced by throwing a stone into the waters of a tranquil lake.

Blois, which, as we have seen, had been as peaceful in the morning as the most unruffled of lakes, was suddenly turned by the announcement of the King's arrival into a scene of uproar and agitation.

Every servant in the castle was, under the guidance of the officers, searching for provisions, and ten couriers were galloping to the preserves of Chambord in quest of game, to the fisheries of the Beuvron in quest of fish, and to the conservatories of Chaverny in quest of fruit and flowers.

Precious tapestries and lustres with huge gilt chains were brought out of wardrobes; an army of poor men were sweeping the yards and washing the stone house-fronts, while their wives were reaping a rich harvest of green branches and wild flowers in the meadows beyond the Loire. The entire city, determined not to fall short in this luxury of cleanliness, tried, with the help of water and an additional supply of brooms and brushes, to look its very best.

The streams in the more elevated quarters of Blois, swollen by these continual lustrations, became rivers when they reached the lower part of the city, and the sidewalks, usually rather muddy, it must be confessed, glistened in their immaculate purity under the genial rays of the sun.

Finally, bands of music were getting ready, and desks were rummaged for musical pieces; there was a run on the stores of wax, ribbons, and sword-knots held by the shopkeepers; housewives collected supplies of bread, meat, and groceries. Already a considerable number of the townsfolk, being without further occupation, as their houses were well enough provisioned to sustain a siege, had donned their festive garb and made their way to the city gate, anxious to be the first to have news of the procession or to see it. Yet they were well aware that the King would not make his appearance until nightfall, or, perhaps, not until the following morning. But what is expectation if it be not a kind of madness, and what is madness if it be not an excess of hopefulness?

In the lower city, about a hundred yards from the Castle of the States and between it and the mall, in a rather handsome street then known as the Rue Vieille (Old street),—and old, indeed, it must have been,—rose a venerable edifice with a pointed gable, very broad and somewhat dumpy in form, and adorned with three windows on the first story, two on the second, and a little bull's-eye on the third.

On the sides of this triangle had been constructed a parallelogram of no small dimensions, which encroached unceremoniously on the street, a custom sanctioned by the ediles of the time. The street was clipped of a quarter of its width, but the

house was enlarged by nearly half its size, so no one had a right to complain.

There was a tradition that the house of the pointed gable had been the abode of a councillor of the provincial parliament in the days of Henri III., and that Queen Catherine came to the city, according to some to visit him, according to others to strangle him. In any case, the good lady must have stepped cautiously when she put her foot across the threshold of this building.

After the councillor's death — whether by strangulation or naturally is of little interest — the house had been sold, then abandoned, then isolated from the other houses in the street. But about the middle of the reign of Louis XIII., an Italian named Cropoli, a fugitive from the kitchens of the Maréchal d'Ancre, took possession of this habitation. He turned it into a little hostelry, and the macaroni he concocted therein was so exquisite that people came from miles and miles around to eat it on the spot or carry some of it home with them.

So famous did the house become that Marie de Médicis, a prisoner at the time in the castle, as we know, actually once sent for some.

This occurred on the very day she escaped through the celebrated window. The dish of macaroni was found on the table where she left it; it had been barely tasted by the royal mouth.

Grateful for the prosperity that had come to his triangular house from a strangulation and a macaroni, the poor man took it into his head to give a high-sounding name to his hostelry. But his Italian origin was anything but a title to popularity in those days, and his modest savings, of which he was careful never to speak, supplied him with a motive for keeping in the background.

When he saw that death was near — he followed Louis XIII. to the tomb in 1643 — he summoned his son, a young scullion of brilliant promise, and, with tears in his eyes, besought him to keep the secret of the macaroni, to Frenchify his name, and, when the clouds that obscured the political horizon should be at length dispelled (the reader will please observe that even at that remote period a figure now so frequently used in Paris and in our legislative halls was in high honor), to have a fine sign-plate wrought by a neighboring smith, upon which sign-plate a famous painter, whom he

designated, should paint portraits of the two Médici queens with this legend at the bottom: "To the Master."

After these injunctions the worthy fellow had barely time to point out to his young successor a slab in the chimney, under which he had buried a thousand ten-franc louis; whereupon he expired.

Cropoli's son, like the courageous fellow he was, bore his loss with resignation and his wealth with modesty. He gradually trained his customers to sound the final vowel of his name so slightly that in time, being aided by a sympathetic public, he was known as M. Cropole, and every one knows that Cropole is quite a French name.

Then he married, having come across a little Frenchwoman with whom he fell in love, and whose parents could not help being reasonably liberal as to her dowry when he showed them what was beneath the chimney flagstone.

These two points accomplished, he started out to seek the painter who was to paint the sign.

The painter was speedily found.

He was an old Italian, an unsuccessful rival of the Raphaels and the Carracci. He proclaimed himself a disciple of the Venetian school, doubtless because he had such a passion for color. His works, of which he had never sold a single one, attracted the observer's notice a hundred yards away, and were such eyesores to the townsfolk that at last he gave up painting in despair.

But it was still his proud boast that he had painted a bath-room for Madame la Maréchale d'Ancre, and he was loud in his lamentations over the burning of this apartment at the time of the marshal's downfall.

Cropoli had entertained a kindly feeling for his fellow-countryman, whose name was Pittrino. Perhaps he had seen the famous pictures in the bath-room. At all events, his respect, or rather friendship, for the illustrious artist was so sincere that he lodged him in his house.

The grateful Pittrino, allowed to indulge his taste for macaroni to his heart's content, did his best to propagate the fame of the national dish, and during the life of its founder his eloquence had been of immense service to the house of Cropoli.

In old age he grew as attached to the son as he had been to the father, and gradually became a sort of superintendent over

the establishment, his stainless honesty, acknowledged sobriety, proverbial chastity, and other virtues too numerous to reckon having won him a permanent seat by the fireside, with the right of overlooking the servants. Moreover, he had the office of taster of the macaroni, whereby he was enabled to preserve the pure flavor assigned to it by ancient tradition. It is but doing him justice to state that a grain of pepper too much, or an atom of parmesan too little, was an unpardonable offence in his eyes. His joy was very great on the day he was invited to share the secret of Cropoli's son and paint the famous sign.

He ransacked his old trunk, and found therein a few pencils, somewhat gnawed by rats but still passable, a few colors in bladders, almost dried up, a little linseed oil in a bottle, and a palette, once the property of Bronzino, that "god of painting," as our ultramontaine artist called him, in his ever-youthful enthusiasm.

Pittrino's heart swelled with joy — at length his genius was recognized!

He did as Raphael had done — he changed his manner, and, adopting the style of the great master, painted two goddesses rather than two queens. These illustrious dames looked so gracious, confronted the astonished gazer with such a blending of the lily and the rose, — a bewitching result of Pittrino's change of manner,— assumed the attitude of sirens so gallantly, that the chief city councillor, after being admitted to a view of this great work of art in Cropole's hall, declared the ladies too beautiful and far too lifelike and gay to figure on a sign at which every passer-by would gaze.

"His royal Highness, monsieur,"— Pittrino was told,— "who often comes into our city, would feel anything but enjoyment at the spectacle of Madame his illustrious mother in such exceedingly scanty raiment, and would, most assuredly, send you to the lowest dungeon beneath his castle, for the heart of our glorious prince is not always tender. Erase, therefore, either the two sirens or the legend; otherwise I forbid you to exhibit the sign in public. I speak in your own interest, Maître Cropole, and in yours, too, Signor Pittrino."

How meet such an objection as this? All Cropole could do was to thank the councillor for his condescension, and he did it.

But Pittrino was disappointed and forlorn.

He was well aware of what was to follow.

The edile was no sooner gone than Cropole, folding his arms, said :

" Well, master, what are we going to do now ? "

" Erase the legend," answered Pittrino, sadly ; " I have some excellent ivory black, and can do it in a jiffy ; for the word *Médici* we 'll substitute *Nymphs* or *Sirens*, just as you like."

" No," said Cropole, " that would not be obeying my father's wishes. My father wanted — "

" The figures," interrupted Pittrino.

" The legend," said Cropole.

" He desired the figures to be good likenesses ; therefore he wanted the figures," retorted Pittrino.

" Yes, but, even if they were n't, who could tell whether they were or were not without the legend ? Even now the memory of these celebrated personages has grown somewhat faint among our fellow-townsmen, and very few of them would recognize Catherine and Marie unless '*Aux Médicis* ' were written beneath them."

" But, then, my figures ? " said Pittrino, in despair, for he felt that Cropole was right. " I do not like the notion of losing the fruits of my labor."

" I do not like the notion of your going to prison and myself to a dungeon."

" Let us efface *Médicis*," entreated Pittrino.

" No," replied Cropole, firmly. " But an idea has just come to me, a sublime idea — your picture shall appear, and my legend also. Does not ' Medici ' signify ' doctor ' in Italian ? "

" Yes, in the plural."

" Order another sign-plate, then, from the smith ; you will paint six doctors on it, and write beneath, '*Aux Médicis :*' that will make a neat play upon words."

" Six doctors ! impossible ! And the composition ! " cried Pittrino.

" That 's your lookout ; but the thing must be done, I am determined on that point. Enough, my macaroni is burning."

Such reasoning was not to be gainsaid ; Pittrino obeyed. He painted the six doctors and the legend on the new sign ; the city councillor was favorably impressed, and authorized its exhibition.

The new sign made an immense hit in the city, thereby, as

Pittrino said, again proving that your vulgar tradesman has no sense of poetry.

To console his painter-in-ordinary, Cropole had the old sign, with its nymphs, hung up in his own bedchamber; and these same nymphs made Madame Cropole blush up to her ears every time she looked at them at night while disrobing.

And now the reader knows why the house of the gable had a sign; now he knows why, on account of its great prosperity, the hostelry of the Médici was compelled to expand into the quadrilateral we have described, and now he knows why there was a hostelry of that name in the city of Blois, whose proprietor was Maître Cropole, and whose painter-in-ordinary was Pittrino.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER.

Based on this foundation, and favored by the popularity of its sign, the prosperity of Maître Cropole's hostelry became solid and durable. He did not anticipate the possession of excessive wealth in the future, but he might reasonably hope to double the thousand louis d'or bequeathed him by his father, to make another thousand by the sale of his house and stock, and to live happy ever afterward as a retired tradesman.

So, as Cropole neglected no opportunity of feathering his nest, the news of King Louis XIV.'s arrival drove him wild with joy.

His wife and himself, Pittrino, and the two scullions at once assaulted all the tenants of the dovecot, the poultry-yard, and the rabbit-hutches; and the screams and lamentations that went up from the precincts of the hostelry des Médicis were as poignant as those heard of yore in Rama.

At this time Cropole had but a single guest in his inn.

This guest was a man approaching thirty, tall and handsome, all his words and gestures denoting seriousness, or rather sadness. He was clad in black velvet trimmed with jet; a white collar, plain as the most austere Puritan's, enhanced the milky whiteness of a youthful neck; a light, blond mustache covered his sensitive and haughty lips.

He looked those he met full in the face, addressing them

unaffectedly but imperiously, and the lightning in his blue eyes was so insupportable that more than one look fell beneath his, as falls the weaker sword in a single combat.

In that age, when men — all created equal by God — were divided by prejudice into two distinct castes, the gentleman and the plebeian, just as they are divided into two distinct races by nature, the black and the white, the person whose portrait we have outlined could not fail to be taken for a gentleman, and a gentleman of the purest lineage. All that was needed was to glance at his white, slender, dainty hands, whose every muscle, every vein, showed under the skin at the slightest movement, while the least nervous agitation was sufficient to color the phalanges.

When this gentleman entered Cropole's hostelry, he took without hesitation, and even without reflection, the principal suite of apartments in the building. In showing them, the innkeeper had, undoubtedly, certain predatory intentions in his head, intentions deserving censure in the eyes of some, but deserving praise in the eyes of those who sympathize with Cropole's skill as a physiognomist in reading people at a glance.

This suite consisted of the entire front of the old triangular house: a spacious drawing-room, lit by two windows on the first story, a little room beside it, and another above it.

Now, ever since his arrival, this gentleman had hardly touched the repasts served him in his chamber. He had spoken but a few words to his host, in which he notified him that a traveller named Parry would call to see him, and that when he did so he was to be sent upstairs immediately.

After this he was so uncommunicative that Cropole was somewhat offended; he was a man who liked people to be sociable.

Now, on the day on which our history begins, this gentleman had risen early in the morning, and going to the window of his drawing-room, had sat down on the sill, leaning over the railing of the balcony, and gazing sadly and persistently up and down the street, watching doubtless for the coming of the traveller of whom he had spoken to the innkeeper.

In this way he had seen Monsieur's little party on its return from its hawking expedition, and, though eagerly expectant, had felt anew the influence of the city's profound restfulness.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a general uproar: poor

people scurrying to the meadows, couriers running hither and thither, busy charwomen, noisy, excited shop-boys, chariots set a-going, hair-dressers tripping quickly past, pages busy as bees. All this tumult and excitement had astonished him, but had not deprived him of that impassive and transcendent majesty which enables the eagle and the lion to look serene and contemptuous, undisturbed by the boisterous transports of the hunters.

Soon the cries of the victims butchered in the poultry-yard, the hurried steps of Madame Cropole on the narrow little creaking stairs, the remarkable agility of Pittrino, who only that morning was smoking at the door with the apathy of a Hollander, all combined to arouse a certain degree of surprise and emotion in the traveller.

Just as he was rising to make inquiries the door of his apartment opened. The stranger very likely believed that the visitor he had so impatiently waited for was about to enter.

He took three rather hurried steps toward the open door.

But instead of the person he had hoped to see, he encountered Maître Cropole, behind whom, in the shadow of the little staircase, appeared Madame Cropole, her rather pretty face being now vulgarized by a spirit of curiosity ; she just glanced stealthily at the handsome gentleman and vanished.

Cropole advanced smilingly, cap in hand, and bowing down to the very ground.

The stranger made a gesture of inquiry, but did not speak.

"Monsieur," said Cropole, "I came to ask by what title I should address you — Monseigneur, M. le Comte, or M. le Marquis ?"

"Address me as '*Monsieur*,' and speak quickly," said the stranger, in a tone that did not admit of discussion or reply.

"Then I should like to know, Monsieur, how you passed the night and whether it is your intention to keep these apartments."

"Yes."

"Monsieur, an event upon which we never calculated has occurred."

"What is it ?"

"His Majesty Louis XIV. to-day enters our city and will remain a day, perhaps two."

"The King of France is in Blois ?"

"He is on the way to it, Monsieur."

"Then all the more reason why I should stay here," said the stranger.

"Very well, Monsieur; but do you intend, Monsieur, to retain all the apartments?"

"I do not understand you. Why should I be content with fewer to-day than I had yesterday?"

"Because, Monsieur, if your Grace permit me to say so, yesterday when you selected the apartments I did not fix on a price which might have led you to believe I underestimated your resources, while to-day —"

The stranger flushed. The idea occurred to him at once that the innkeeper, supposing him poor, was insulting him.

"While to-day," he returned coldly, "you do underestimate them?"

"Monsieur, I am a man of honor, praise be to God! and though you look upon me as a mere hotel-keeper, there is gentle blood in my veins. My father was a servitor and officer in the household of the late Maréchal d'Ancre — God rest his soul!"

"I do not dispute your statement; what I want to know, and know quickly, is the object of your questions."

"You are too reasonable not to understand, Monsieur, that our city is small, that the court is going to crowd into it, that the houses will swarm with lodgers, and that rents, consequently, must increase considerably."

The stranger flushed again.

"Name your terms, monsieur," said he.

"I do so with some reluctance, Monsieur, for, while I like an honest profit, I do not want to be either churlish or grasping. Now, the apartments you occupy are spacious, and you are alone —"

"That is my affair."

"Oh, certainly; and so I do not ask you to leave, Monsieur."

The blood surged to the stranger's temples; he darted a look at our poor Cropole, descendant of an officer of M. le Maréchal d'Ancre, that would have made him wish to be under the famous slab in the chimney, did not a question of self-interest force him to keep his ground.

"Do you desire me to go?" said he; "explain yourself, and that promptly."

"Monsieur, Monsieur, you fail to understand me. This is a

matter of some delicacy, and no doubt I do not make myself clear, or else, perhaps, as you are a foreigner, Monsieur, as I perceive by your accent — "

In fact, the stranger did speak with the slight drawl which is a noticeable characteristic of Englishmen, even when they speak French with the utmost purity.

"As you are a foreigner, Monsieur, I repeat, perhaps you do not catch the full meaning of my words. What I should take the liberty of asking you to do, Monsieur, would be to give up one or two of your rooms; this would at once lessen your rent considerably and ease my conscience. I do not like the notion of increasing the rent of apartments exorbitantly which I have already had the honor of letting to you at a reasonable price."

"What were my expenses yesterday?"

"A louis, Monsieur, meals and the care of your horse included."

"Very well. And to-day?"

"Ah, that is the trouble. The King arrives to-day; if the court sleeps here to-night the rent for the day must be reckoned in the bill. Now, three rooms at two louis a room per day make six louis. Two louis, Monsieur, are nothing, but six louis are a good deal."

The stranger, instead of turning red as before, now turned very pale.

With heroic bravery he drew a purse from his pocket, a purse embroidered with arms which he carefully concealed in the palm of his hand. A very lean purse it was, and its flabbiness did not escape the eyes of Cropole.

The stranger emptied this purse into his hand. It contained three double louis, the equivalent of the six louis mentioned by the innkeeper.

Still, Cropole required seven.

He looked, therefore, at the stranger as much as to say: "Where is the other?"

"There is a louis lacking, is there not, Master Innkeeper?"

"Yes, Monsieur, but — "

The stranger dived into his breeches pocket, and brought to light a little pocketbook, a gold key, and some silver.

When he counted the coin he found he had a louis.

"Thanks, Monsieur," said Cropole. "All I have to ask you now, Monsieur, is to tell me whether you intend to remain in

these apartments to-morrow. If you do, I am satisfied; but if you have other plans, I could let them to some of his Majesty's courtiers, who will soon be here."

"It is only just," returned the stranger, after a somewhat prolonged silence, "but you see for yourself I have no more money, and as I purpose to retain the rooms, you will have either to sell this diamond in town or keep it as a pledge."

Cropole stared such a length of time at the diamond that the stranger added hurriedly:

"I prefer you should sell it, monsieur; it is worth three hundred pistoles. A Jew — are there Jews in Blois? — will give two or even two hundred and fifty for it. Take whatever he give you, though it only amount to the price of your lodgings. Go!"

"Oh! Monsieur," cried Cropole, abashed by a sense of his meanness in presence of such noble and disinterested confidence, and of the stranger's unchangeable patience in presence of his own distrust and chicanery; "oh! Monsieur, we are not such thieves in Blois as you would seem to imagine, and the diamond being worth as much as you say —"

The stranger again crushed Cropole with a flash from his blue eyes.

"I assure you, Monsieur," the innkeeper exclaimed, "I am totally ignorant of the value of diamonds."

"But the jewellers are not," said the stranger; "go and ask them. And now I believe we have settled our accounts, have we not?"

"Yes, Monsieur, and to my sincere regret, for I am afraid I have offended you, Monsieur."

"By no means," replied the stranger, with an air of overpowering majesty.

"Or have seemed to be desirous of fleecing a noble traveller. But consider, Monsieur, the peculiarity of the case."

"I do not want to hear any more about the matter, I tell you; be kind enough to leave the room."

Cropole made a profound inclination, and the shamefaced air with which he retired proved that he was a good-hearted fellow at bottom and actuated by genuine remorse.

The stranger went and closed the door after him; then when he was alone he examined the purse from which he had taken a little silken bag containing the diamond, his last resource.

He also verified the emptiness of his pockets, looked

earnestly at the papers in his pocketbook, and was convinced that he was in a state of absolute poverty.

He raised his eyes to heaven, with a sublime gesture that denoted at once his calmness and his despair, dashed off with his trembling hand some drops of perspiration that coursed down his noble brow, and turned again to the earth a face that a moment ago had borne the impress of a majesty almost divine.

The storm that shook him was passed; perhaps he had prayed in the depths of his soul.

He went back to the window, took his former seat in the balcony, and there he remained, as still and apathetic as if he had been numbered among the dead, until the moment when the skies began to darken, and the first torches passed along the flower-scented street, giving the signal for illuminating all the windows in the city.

CHAPTER VII.

PARRY.

Just as the stranger was commencing to view these lights with some interest and lending an ear to the various noises, Maître Cropole entered his chamber, followed by two waiters, who laid the cloth.

The stranger paid not the slightest attention to them.

Cropole, however, approached his guest with the deepest respect and whispered these words in his ear:

"Monsieur, the diamond has been valued."

"Ah!" returned the traveller. "Well?"

"Well, Monsieur, the jeweller of his royal Highness will give two hundred and eighty pistoles for it."

"Have you them with you?"

"I thought it prudent to take them, Monsieur; still, I did so only on condition that you should have the right to ransom the diamond when you were in funds, if you thought proper to do so."

"Not at all necessary; I told you to sell it."

"Then I have obeyed you, or almost obeyed you, for, though I have not finally sold the jewel, I have got its price."

"Pay yourself," added the stranger.

"Since you absolutely insist, Monsieur, I will do so."

A melancholy smile trembled for a moment on the gentleman's lip.

"Put the money on that trunk," said he, turning away his head as soon as he had pointed to the piece of furniture in question.

Cropole laid as directed a rather large bag on the trunk, having first taken from it the amount of his reckoning.

"And now I hope you will not pain me, Monsieur, by refusing to partake of your supper. The dinner was left untouched; really, Monsieur, you cast reproach on the house of the Médici. See, the supper is served, and I venture to say it looks rather tempting."

The stranger broke off a piece of bread, asked for a glass of wine, and ate and drank at the window.

Before long a deafening flourish of trumpets resounded, shouts were heard from afar, there was a confused rumbling in the lower part of the city, and the first distinct sound that reached the stranger's ears was the tramp of advancing horses.

"The King! the King!" shouted a vociferous and excited crowd.

"The King!" repeated Cropole, forgetful of his guest and of all his ideas of politeness, in his eagerness to satisfy his curiosity.

Madame Cropole, Pittrino, the waiters and scullions were out on the landing with Cropole, pushing and jostling one another.

The procession advanced slowly, illuminated by thousands of torches and candles in the street and windows.

In the rear of a company of musketeers and of gentlemen marching shoulder to shoulder came the litter of Cardinal Mazarin. It was drawn by four black horses, just as if it were a carriage.

Behind the cardinal came his pages and attendants.

The queen mother's carriage advanced next, with her maids of honor seated at the windows; it was escorted by gentlemen on horseback.

Then appeared the King, mounted on a splendid horse of the Saxon breed, with flowing mane.

The young prince bent his head in the direction of certain windows where the cheering was loudest; the face, which was lit up by the torches of his pages, was noble and gracious.

By the side of the King, though two paces in the rear, rode the Prince de Condé, M. Dangeau, and twenty other courtiers, closing up this truly triumphal procession.

The entire march had an exclusively military character.

A few of the elderly courtiers were garbed in the usual travelling costume; but almost all were arrayed in the accoutrements of war. Many wore the gorget and buff coat of the days of Henri IV. and Louis XIII.

When the King passed in front of him, the stranger, who had leaned over the balcony to get a better view and who had hidden his face by resting it on his arm, felt his heart swell and overflow with a bitter jealousy.

The blare of the trumpets intoxicated him, the cheers of the people deafened him, and for a moment his reason was overwhelmed by this flood of light, tumult, and dazzling images.

"Ah! he is a king, a king!" he murmured, in tones of despair and anguish that must have mounted to the foot of God's throne.

Then before he had recovered from his gloomy reverie, all the noise and all the splendor had vanished. A few hoarse, discordant voices, shouting at intervals, "Long live the King!" was all that remained of the pageant, at the corner of the street beneath him.

There also remained, however, the six candles held by the tenants of the hostelry des Médicis: two by Cropole, one by Pittrino, and one by each of the scullions.

Cropole never gave up repeating:

"How handsome the King is, and what a strong likeness he bears to his illustrious father!"

"When viewed in a favorable light," said Pittrino.

"And what a lofty air he has!" added Madame Cropole, who was already discussing the procession with her neighbors, male and female.

Cropole was so busy supplying further food for their gossip with his personal observations that he did not notice an old man, who was on foot, but leading a little Irish horse by the bridle, and trying to force his way though a crowd of men and women stationed before the Médici.

At this moment, however, the voice of the stranger at the window was heard saying:

"Master Innkeeper, you should see to it that persons are not prevented from entering your house."

Cropole turned round, perceived the old man for the first time, and opened a passage for him.

The window was then shut.

Pittrino showed the way into the inn to the newcomer, who entered without uttering a word.

The stranger was waiting for him on the landing; he opened his arms to the old man and led him to a chair, which the latter refused.

"Oh, no, no, Sire!" said he. "Sit down in your presence! never!"

"Parry," cried the gentleman, "do, I beseech you — you have come all the way from England — from such a distance! Ah! it is not at your time of life that such fatigues should be encountered in my service. Pray, rest for a while."

"I must give you my report, Sire, before anything else."

"Parry, I entreat you to say nothing. If your news were good, you would not have begun with such a phrase as that. You do not come straight to the point, and, therefore, your news is bad."

"Sire," answered the old man, "do not be in a hurry to get alarmed. All, I hope, is not lost. But we must have resolution, perseverance, and, above all, resignation."

"Parry, I made my way here alone, through innumerable snares and perils; does not that show resolution? I have been ten years planning this journey, in spite of every sort of advice to the contrary and in spite of every sort of obstacle; does not that show perseverance? I sold this evening my father's last diamond, for I had not money enough to pay for my lodging, and the hotel-keeper was going to turn me out."

The old man made a gesture of indignation, to which the young man's reply was a pressure of the hand and a smile.

"I have still two hundred and seventy-four pistoles, and I consider that I am wealthy; I do not despair; does not that show resignation, Parry?"

The old man raised his trembling hands to heaven.

"Come, now," continued the stranger, "do not hide anything from me; what has happened?"

"My narrative will be brief, Sire; but in Heaven's name do not tremble thus!"

"I tremble with impatience, Parry. Come, come, what did the general say to you?"

"In the first place, the general refused to receive me."

"He took you for a spy?"

"Yes, but I wrote him a letter."

"And then?"

"He received and read it."

"Did that letter give a clear explanation of my position and intentions?"

"Oh, yes," returned Parry, with a melancholy smile, "it reproduced your ideas faithfully."

"What next?"

"The next thing the general did was to send me back my letter by an aide-de-camp, with a notification that if on the next day I were found in the district under his military jurisdiction he would have me arrested."

"Arrested!" murmured the young man. "You, my most faithful servant, arrested!"

"Yes, Sire."

"And did you sign *Parry* to the letter?"

"As plainly as could be. Besides, the aide-de-camp had known me at Saint James, and," added the old man, with a sigh, "at Whitehall."

The young man bowed his head, pensive and gloomy.

"He may have acted thus before his people," said he, trying to cheat himself with false hopes, "but secretly, when you were alone together, how did he act? Answer."

"Alas, Sire, he sent me four of his troopers, who gave me the horse with which you saw me returning. The soldiers galloped with me to the little port of Tenby, flung me into a fishing-boat that was about to sail to Brittany, and here I am."

"Oh!" sighed the young man convulsively grasping his throat with his nervous hand to keep back a sob. "Is that all, Parry, is that all?"

"Yes, Sire, that is all."

After this brief answer there was a long silence, broken only by the sound of the young man's heel frantically beating the floor.

The old man endeavored to change the conversation; the thoughts it led to were sinister.

"Sire," said he, "what was the cause of the uproar I heard on my way? Why were the people crying: 'Long live the King!'? Who is the king, and what mean all these lights?"

"Indeed! so you do not know, Parry?" answered the young man, ironically; "it is the King of France visiting his

good city of Blois; all these trumpets are his, all those gilt housings his, all these gentlemen and their swords his. His mother precedes him in a carriage magnificently incrusted with silver and gold! Happy mother! His minister amasses millions for his needs, and is conducting him to a rich bride. And at all this his people are jubilant, for they love their King, acclaim him with their cheers, and cry: 'Long live the King! Long live the King!'"

"Oh, Sire!" exclaimed Parry more uneasy at the drift of the conversation now than he was before.

"You are aware," resumed the young man, "that amid all these rejoicings in honor of Louis XIV., my mother and my sister are without bread; you are aware that in another fortnight I shall be shamed and shunned, for then the whole of Europe will have learned the tidings you have brought me! Parry, there are instances where men of my rank have —"

"Sire, in the name of Heaven!"

"You are right, Parry, I am a coward, and, if I do nothing for myself, what will God do? No, no, I have two arms, Parry, and a sword."

And striking his arm violently with his hand, he took down a sword that hung against the wall.

"What are you about to do, Sire?"

"What am I about to do, Parry? what all my family are doing. My mother lives on public charity; my sister begs for my mother; somewhere or other my brothers are begging for them; well, I, the eldest, am going to do what the others are doing — I am going to ask for an alms!"

And here he broke off, with a convulsive, ghastly laugh, buckled on his sword, took his hat from the trunk, fastened around his shoulder the black cloak he had worn during his travels, and, seizing the hands of the old man, who was gazing at him anxiously, said:

"My dear Parry, order a fire, drink, eat, sleep, and be merry; yes, we must both be merry, my leal and only friend; we are rich as kings!"

He struck the bag of pistoles, which fell heavily on the floor, laughed again in the lugubrious fashion that had frightened Parry, and while the rest of the household was shouting, singing, and getting rooms ready for the courtiers, who had been preceded by their lackeys, he glided along the great hall into the street, and in a minute or so was lost sight of by the old man, who was stationed at the window.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW HIS MAJESTY LOUIS XIV. LOOKED AT TWENTY-TWO.

It will be seen from our description of the entry of Louis XIV. that it was noisy and brilliant, as well as very satisfactory to his youthful Majesty.

When the King arrived at the portal of the Castle of the States he was met by his royal Highness, Gaston, Duc d'Orleans, surrounded by his guards and gentlemen, whose naturally imposing demeanor derived fresh lustre and dignity from the solemnity of the occasion.

Madame, arrayed in her state robes, awaited her nephew in one of the interior balconies. All the windows of the castle, so gloomy and deserted on ordinary days, were resplendent with ladies and torches.

And so the young King crossed the threshold of that castle, amid the roll of drums, the blare of trumpets, and loud huzzas, where seventy-two years before Henri III. had called upon treachery and assassination to aid him in keeping on his head and in his house a crown which was slipping from his brow and ready to fall to another family.

After admiring the beautiful, noble, and charming prince, every eye turned in search of that other king of France, king in a very different fashion from his sovereign, an aged, pale, and stooping king, who was known as Cardinal Mazarin.

Louis at this time had more than his share of all those natural gifts which constitute the perfect gentleman: his eyes, of a heavenly blue, were at once mild and brilliant; but the most skilful physiognomists — those divers into souls — would never have been able to fathom those abysmal depths of mildness, no matter how long they stared at them, if it were indeed possible, in any case, for a subject to support the gaze of his king. For the eyes of the King were, in their immense profundity, like the azure vaults of heaven; or like those other vaults, more awful and almost as sublime, which the Mediterranean, that gigantic mirror wherein the sky loves to reflect both its stars and its tempests, discloses beneath the keels of its ships on some fine summer's day.

The King was short of stature, scarcely five feet two inches; but, even if his youth had not excused this defect, it would

have been counterbalanced by the nobleness of all his movements and his dexterity in all bodily exercises.

Assuredly he was every inch a king; and it was something to be a king in this era of traditional respect and devotion; but as until now he had been very little seen by his people — and then in poor surroundings — and as he had always been seen in the company of his mother, a very tall woman, and of M. le Cardinal, a man of imposing presence, many considered him quite too small for a king, and said:

"The King is not as big as the cardinal."

But whatever might be the observations made on his physical condition in other parts of France, and especially in the capital, the young prince was received as a god by the inhabitants of Blois, and almost as a king by his uncle and aunt, Monsieur and Madame the inhabitants of the castle.

We had better state, however, that when he perceived in the reception hall chairs of equal height placed for himself, his mother, the cardinal, his uncle, and his aunt — though from the semi-circular construction of the apartment they did not, at first sight, appear to be so — his face flushed with anger, and he examined the features of those present with the object of discovering if this slight were intentional; but as he could read nothing in the cardinal's impassive countenance or in his mother's, he became resigned and sat down, taking care to be seated before everybody else.

The gentlemen and the ladies were presented to their Majesties and to his Eminence.

The King noticed that both his mother and himself seldom recognized the names of those presented, while the cardinal, on the other hand, with his admirable memory and presence of mind, never failed to talk to every one of them about his estates or ancestors or children, even naming some of the latter. This flattered these honest squires immensely and strengthened them in their belief that he alone is king who is acquainted with his subjects, for the same reason that the sun has no rival, because the sun alone gives heat and life.

During this time the King was engaged in the study of the physiognomy of his subjects, a study he had prosecuted long before, although no one suspected it, and was trying to decipher the meaning in the lines of faces he had at first thought very insignificant and commonplace.

At length a collation was served. The King, though he did not venture to make any demands on his uncle's hospitality, had waited for it impatiently. So now he had all the honors due, if not to his rank, at least to his appetite.

As for the cardinal, he barely touched with his lips a soup served in a golden cup. The omnipotent minister who had wrested her regency from the queen mother and his royalty from the King could not wrest a good stomach from nature.

Anne of Austria, already suffering from the cancer that was the cause of her death ten years later, ate scarcely more than the cardinal.

As for Monsieur, he was so puffed up by the great event that had broken the monotony of his provincial life that he did not eat at all.

Madame alone, like a true Lorrainer, seemed to be willing to try conclusions with his Majesty; so that Louis XIV., who, but for her aid, would have been forced to eat almost by himself, was, in the first place, very grateful to his aunt, and, in the second, to M. de Saint-Remy, her house-steward, who had really distinguished himself on this occasion.

The collation over, on a sign from M. de Mazarin the King rose, and, on his aunt's invitation, moved about among the ranks of the assemblage.

It was now noticed by the ladies — and the women of Blois are as alive to certain matters as are those of Paris — that there was a quickness and hardihood in Louis XIV.'s looks which foreshadowed a distinguished appreciator of beauty. The men for their part observed that the prince was haughty and arrogant, and liked to make the eyes of those who gazed at him too long or too intently fall before his, which seemed to portend a master.

Louis XIV. had made the tour of about one-third of those present, when a certain word, pronounced by his Eminence during his conversation with Monsieur, smote upon his ear.

This word was a woman's name.

No sooner did he hear this word than he heard — or, at least listened to — nothing else, and neglecting the arc of the circle which was waiting for a visit, he made every effort to reach the extremity of the curve.

Like the ingenious courtier that he was, Monsieur had been inquiring after the health of his Eminence's nieces. For, in fact, some five or six years previously three of the cardinal's

nieces had come to him from Italy: Mesdemoiselles Hortense, Olympe, and Marie de Mancini.

Monsieur was, then, inquiring after the health of the cardinal's nieces. He regretted, he said, that he had not the pleasure of meeting them as well as their uncle; they must have certainly grown in grace and beauty, as they had promised to do the first time Monsieur had seen them.

The first thing that struck the King was the contrast between the voices of the two speakers. Monsieur's voice was grave and natural, while M. de Mazarin's had jumped a note and a half above the scale of his usual tones.

It looked as though he wished his voice to reach an ear that was a considerable distance away, at the end of the hall.

"Monseigneur," he replied, "the Desmoiselles de Mazarin have still to finish their education, have to fulfil certain duties and make a provision for the future. They would idle away their time in a young and brilliant court."

Louis smiled sadly at these last words. It was true the court was young, but the avaricious cardinal had taken good care that it should not be brilliant.

"But surely you do not intend them to be nuns," answered Monsieur, "or to marry them among untitled people?"

"Oh, by no means," said the cardinal, emphasizing his Italian accent in such a way that, instead of being soft and velvety, it became shrill and vibratory. "By no means. I am firmly resolved they shall marry, and well too."

"They will not lack suitors, M. le Cardinal," answered Monsieur, in the tone of one good-natured tradesman congratulating another.

"I hope so, Monseigneur, especially since God has been pleased to endow them with virtue, grace, and beauty."

It was during this conversation, as we have already stated, that Louis XIV. was making the tour of the circle and receiving the persons presented by Madame.

"Mademoiselle Arnoux," said the princess, presenting a stout blonde, who, if seen at a village festival, would have been taken for a peasant woman in her Sunday clothes, "Mademoiselle Arnoux, the daughter of my music mistress."

The King smiled. Madame had never been able to strike four correct notes on the viol or harpsichord in her life.

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," she continued, "a young lady of rank and an excellent servant of mine."

It was not the King but the young lady that smiled now; this was the first time in her existence that Madame, who was not at all inclined to spoil her with kindness, had bestowed upon her such an honorable epithet.

The reverence made to his Majesty by our old acquaintance Montalais was more than ordinarily profound, and this from necessity as well as respect; she had to hide a certain quivering of her laughing lips which the King might not have attributed to the real cause.

This was the very moment when the King heard the word that startled him.

"And the third's name?" inquired Monsieur.

"Marie, Monseigneur," replied the cardinal.

There must have been, really, a certain magical power in this name, for, as we have said, it startled the King, who hurried Madame into the middle of the circle as if he wished to speak to her confidentially; his genuine motive, however, was his desire to get nearer to the cardinal.

"Aunt," he whispered laughingly, "my professor of geography never told me Blois was at such an immense distance from Paris."

"What do you mean, nephew?" asked Madame.

"Apparently it must take the fashions of the capital several years to reach you. Look at those young ladies!"

"Oh, I am acquainted with them all!"

"Some of them are pretty."

"Do not say so too loudly, my good nephew; you would turn their heads."

"You ought to have waited, my dear aunt," replied the King, with a smile, "you would have found the second part of my remark made amends for the first. Well, then, my dear aunt, some of them seem old, and others of them ugly, and all owing to the antiquated fashion in which they are dressed."

"But, Sire, Blois is only a five-days' journey from Paris."

"Indeed!" retorted the King; "then they are two years behind the times for every day."

"Really, now, do you think so? It is strange, I don't notice it."

"See here, aunt," said Louis, managing to come still closer to Mazarin under pretence of selecting a better point of view, "look at all that old-world finery, all those ostentatious coiffures, and then look at yon plain white dress. The wearer

is probably one of my mother's maids of honor, though I do not know her. What an unaffected bearing! What a graceful deportment! Ah, it is easily seen she is a woman, while all the rest are simply clothes."

"My dear nephew," replied Madame, laughing, "allow me to tell you that as a sorcerer you are completely at sea this time. The young person you praise so highly is not a Parisian, she belongs to Blois."

"Oh, now, aunt!" exclaimed the King, incredulously.

"Come here, Louise," said Madame.

And the young girl, whose acquaintance we have already made under this name, approached timidly, blushing and almost bending to the ground beneath the gaze of royalty.

"Mademoiselle Louise Françoise de la Beaume-Leblanc, daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière," said Madame, ceremoniously.

Notwithstanding her excessive timidity in the presence of the King, the young girl bowed with such grace that his Majesty lost some words of the conversation between Monsieur and the cardinal while looking at her.

"Stepdaughter," continued Madame, "of M. de Saint-Remy, my house-steward, the gentleman who superintended the cooking of that stew of truffled turkey which your Majesty appreciated so highly."

Neither grace nor youth nor beauty could maintain its standing before such a presentation as this. The King smiled. Whether Madame spoke in jest or was unconscious of the import of her words, the result was the same, and all the grace and charm that had aroused the admiration of Louis were ruined by them in his eyes.

So far as Mademoiselle de la Vallière was now concerned, she was for the King, as well as for Madame, simply the stepdaughter of a man who evinced remarkable talent in the preparation of truffled turkey.

But this is the way with princes. It used also to be the way with the gods and goddesses in Olympus. Diana and Venus must have picked the lovely Alcmena and the luckless Io to pieces when they condescended, in the absence of other amusement, to speak of mortal beauties at Jupiter's table, between the nectar and ambrosia.

Happily for Louise, she had bent so low that she neither heard Madame's words nor saw the King's smile. In fact, if

the poor child, who alone of her companions had the good taste to dress in white, — if that dovelike heart, so easy a mark for every cruel shaft, had been smitten by Madame's cruel words and the King's cold, selfish smile, she would have expired on the spot.

And that ingenious diplomatist, Montalais herself, would have made no attempt to restore her to life, for ridicule kills everything, even beauty.

But luckily, as we have said, there was such a humming in Louise's ears and such a mist before her eyes that she neither saw nor heard, and the King, all of whose attention was absorbed by the conversation of his uncle with the cardinal, hastened to draw near them.

He arrived just as it was concluding with these words of Mazarin:

"Marie, like her sisters, is at this moment journeying to Brouage. I ordered them to travel along the other side of the Loire, and if my calculations be correct, and if they have followed my directions, they will be on the opposite side of the bridge of Blois to-morrow."

These words were pronounced with that tactful modulation, that sureness of tone, intention, and compass, which made Signor Giulio Mazarini the greatest comedian in the world.

The result was that these words went straight to the King's heart, and the cardinal, who had turned round on his arrival, noted their immediate effect on his pupil's face, an effect betrayed to the eyes of his Eminence by a blush. For that matter, what was the tracking out of such a paltry secret to one who had, for twenty years, fathomed the designs and foiled the plans of every statesman in Europe?

It seemed as though the young King had received a poisoned arrow in his breast as soon as these last words reached his ears. He moved about from place to place and gazed with wavering, glassy eyes on those around him. He looked again and again appealingly at his mother, who, besides being controlled by a glance from Mazarin, was enjoying a colloquy with her sister-in-law, and apparently did not see the ardent entreaty expressed by her son's face.

From that moment everything — beauty, lights, flowers — became odious and insipid to Louis XIV. After biting his lips and stretching his legs and arms repeatedly, like a well-bred child who, while not daring to yawn, exhibits his weariness in

every other way within his reach, the King, abandoning the hopeless task of trying to melt his mother and his minister, turned his eyes in despair toward the door, as if liberty were there.

Leaning against the doorway and standing out from it in strong relief was a face that struck him — a dark, haughty face, with stern but brilliant eyes, aquiline nose, long gray hair and black mustache, a genuine type of military beauty. His gorget, brighter than a mirror, broke up the luminous reflections that converged on it and sent them back as flashes of lightning. This officer wore a gray hat surmounted by a red plume, proof positive that he was there on duty and not in search of pleasure. If he were in search of pleasure, if he had been a courtier and not a soldier, he would have had to pay some price or other for the pleasure, he would have had to carry his hat in his hand.

But the most convincing proof of all that this officer was on duty and performing a task to which he was accustomed was the noticeable indifference and apathy wherewith, with folded arms, he regarded the joys and discomforts incidental to this festival. Like the philosopher he was — for all old soldiers are philosophers — he seemed to have an infinitely clearer understanding of the discomforts than of the joys; he could, however, take his share of the latter andkeep the former away from him when he felt inclined.

He was leaning, then, as we have stated, against the carved door-frame, when the sad, tired eyes of the King met his own.

It was not the first time, seemingly, that the eyes of the officer had encountered the eyes of the prince and discovered their meaning and expression; for no sooner had those eyes of his rested on the features of Louis XIV., and through the features read what was passing in the depths of his soul, namely, the utter lassitude that was crushing him, the faltering resolution to get away from all this, than he perceived clearly that he must serve the King, although the King did not ask for his service, — must serve him almost in spite of himself; and, as boldly as if he had been commanding a cavalry squadron on a field of battle, he cried in resonant tones:

"On his Majesty's service!"

The words had, in very truth, the effect of a roar of thunder,

rising high above the orchestra, the singing, the buzz and hum of the promenaders. The cardinal and the queen looked at the King in amazement.

Louis XIV., pale but firm, strengthened in his determination by finding that this officer of musketeers had an intuitive knowledge of the thoughts that were agitating his inmost heart, as was clearly manifested by the order just given, rose from his chair and advanced towards the door.

"Are you leaving us, my son?" said the queen, while Mazarin merely questioned him by a look, a look that would have seemed mild if it were not so piercing.

"Yes, Madame," answered the King, "I feel fatigued, and, along with that, I have to write a letter to-night."

A smile flitted across the lips of the minister, who nodded, as if he were giving the King permission to withdraw.

Monsieur and Madame at once hastened to give orders to the officers who had just entered.

The King saluted, crossed the hall, and reached the door, at which a line of twenty musketeers awaited him. At the end of this line was stationed the officer, motionless and with a drawn sword in his hand. The King passed through, and the entire assembly stood up on tiptoe as long as he was in sight.

Ten musketeers cleared a passage for the King through the crowd in the antechambers and on the stairs. Ten others escorted the King and Monsieur, who insisted on attending his Majesty.

The gentlemen in waiting walked behind.

The little procession accompanied the King as far as the apartments assigned him. These apartments were the ones occupied by Henri III. during his stay at Blois when the States General met in that city.

Monsieur had given his orders. The musketeers, led by their officer, marched into the little corridor which connects two wings of the castle. The entrance was through a small square antechamber, dark even on the finest days.

Monsieur stopped Louis XIV.

"Sire," said he, "you are passing the very spot where the Duc de Guise was first stabbed."

The King, who was very ignorant of history, had heard of this assassination, but knew nothing about the details or the place where it occurred.

"Indeed!" said he with a shudder.

And he halted. It was the signal for all before and behind him to pause also.

"The duke, Sire," continued Gaston, "stood pretty nearly in the place where I am standing; he was going in the same direction as your Majesty; M. de Loignes was precisely where your lieutenant of musketeers is; M. de Sainte-Maline and his Majesty's gentlemen in ordinary were behind and around him; it was there he was struck."

The King turned round toward his officer and saw something like a cloud pass over that martial and daring visage.

"Yes, from behind," murmured the lieutenant, with a gesture of supreme disdain.

And he tried to resume the march, as if he felt ill at ease between these walls once sullied by treachery.

But the King, who was evidently desirous of information, appeared inclined to give another look at this lugubrious spot.

Gaston understood his nephew's wish.

"See, Sire," said he, taking a torch from the hand of M. de Saint-Remy, "there is where he fell; there was a bed yonder at the time, and he tore the curtains by trying to keep hold of them."

"Why is there a hollow in the floor at this particular point?" inquired Louis.

"Because it is the place where the blood flowed," answered Gaston; "the blood sank so deeply in the oak that it was only by cutting it away it could be got rid of; even as it was," added Gaston, bringing the torch near to the designated spot, "it was found utterly impossible to remove that reddish stain."

Louis XIV. raised his head. Perhaps he was thinking of the bloody spot shown him one day in the Louvre, — the counterpart of that at Blois, — and which had been made on a certain occasion by the king his father, with the blood of Concini.

"Forward!" said he.

The march was immediately resumed, for there was a tone of command in the young prince's voice — the result doubtless of emotion — to which no one had been accustomed hitherto.

On arriving at the King's apartments, with which not only the little corridor we have just described communicated, but also the grand staircase opening on the court, Gaston said:

"Will your Majesty deign to accept these apartments, unworthy though they are to receive you?"

"Uncle," replied the prince, "I am grateful for your cordial hospitality."

Gaston saluted his nephew, was embraced by him, and retired.

Ten of the twenty musketeers who had escorted the King conducted Monsieur back to the reception rooms, which had not been entirely vacated, notwithstanding the King's departure. The other ten were posted by the officer, who in five minutes had himself explored all the different localities with that steady and assured look which habit does not always give, unless that glance be an attribute of genius.

Then, when he had disposed of all his men, he selected as his headquarters the ante-room, wherein he found a large arm-chair, a lamp, wine, water, and bread. He lighted the lamp, drank half a glass of wine, smiled an expressive smile, made himself as comfortable as possible in his arm-chair, and prepared to go to sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE INCOGNITO OF THE STRANGER OF THE HÔTELLERIE DES MÉDICIS IS REVEALED.

The officer who was sleeping, or getting ready to sleep, was, notwithstanding his off-hand manner, charged with a very grave responsibility.

As lieutenant of the King's musketeers, he commanded the entire company that had come from Paris, and this company numbered one hundred and twenty men; but, except the twenty we have mentioned, the other hundred were employed in guarding the queen mother and the cardinal, especially the cardinal.

Signor Giulio Mazarini saved something by not having to pay the travelling expenses of his own guards, and so he was in the habit of making use of those of the King instead, and no small number of them either, as he proved by taking fifty on the present occasion, a peculiarity of his that would have

seemed highly improper to a foreigner not acquainted with the customs of this court.

What would have struck this foreigner as, if not improper, at least extraordinary, was that the wing of the castle assigned to the cardinal was brilliant, dazzling, full of life and movement. The musketeers mounted guard before every door, allowing no one to pass except the couriers who followed the cardinal in all his journeys for the purpose of taking charge of his correspondence.

Twenty men were at the service of the queen mother, and thirty rested, so that they might be ready to relieve their comrades on the following day.

But the King's apartments, on the other hand, were dark, silent, and lonely. When once the doors were shut, there was no longer any appearance of royalty. All the men on duty had gradually withdrawn. M. le Prince had sent to inquire if he could be of any service to his Majesty, and on the usual *no* of the lieutenant of musketeers, who was accustomed to the question and the answer, every one prepared to go to bed, just as he might have done in the house of some honest citizen.

And yet it was easy enough to hear from the royal quarters the airs played by the bands at the festival and to see the splendidly illuminated windows of the grand hall.

Ten minutes after his entrance into his apartments, Louis XIV. was able to perceive that the cardinal was leaving, from the fact that his departure created much more excitement than his own had done, and that he was escorted to his bed-chamber by a large crowd of ladies and gentlemen.

To witness all this he had only to look through the window, the shutters of which had not been closed.

His Eminence crossed the court, attended by Monsieur, who held a torch before him; then came the queen mother, leaning on the arm of Madame, both of them chatting familiarly, whispering to each other like two old friends.

Behind these two couples marched a long procession of great ladies, pages, and officers. The flames of the torches were like the moving reflections of a conflagration, and seemed to set the entire court on fire; at length the sound of footsteps and voices was lost in the upper stories of the palace.

During this time no one gave a single thought to the King, who, leaning his head on his hand at the window, had followed

sadly all this magnificence that was passing before his eyes, had listened to all this noise as it died away; no one except, perhaps, the stranger guest of the Hôtellerie des Médicis, whom we saw passing out of the inn, wrapped up in his black cloak.

He had gone straight toward the castle, and with his face of gloom had for some time prowled about the palace, which was still surrounded by a considerable crowd; then perceiving that there were no guards at the grand entrance or at the porch — for the soldiers of Monsieur were fraternizing with the soldiers of the King, that is to say, were tossing off the wine of Beaugency at discretion, or rather indiscretion — the stranger made his way through the throng, crossed the court, and at length arrived at the landing which led to the cardinal's apartments.

Probably he was induced to take this direction by the brightness of the torches and the busy air of the pages and men on duty.

But he was stopped by finding a musket aimed at him and also by a shout from the sentry.

"Where are you going, friend?" asked the soldier.

"I am going to see the King," replied the stranger, quietly but haughtily.

The soldier called one of the cardinal's officers, who said, somewhat in the tone employed by an office clerk to a petitioner for a favor from the ministry:

"The other stairs, facing you."

And the officer, paying no further heed to the stranger, resumed his interrupted conversation.

The stranger made no answer and took his way to the stairs to which he had been directed. In this quarter there was not a single torch, nor could a sound be heard. The darkness was such that only the shadowy outline of the sentry could be discerned. The stillness was so profound that the echo of his footsteps, accompanied by the jingling of his spurs on the flagstones, fell distinctly on the ear.

This sentry was one of the twenty guards set apart for the King's service, and mounted guard with the rigidity and indifference of a statue.

"Who goes there?" said he.

"A friend," answered the stranger.

"What do you want?"

"To speak to the King."

"Indeed! Well, my good friend, I don't think you'll do so."

"And why?"

"Because the King is in bed."

"In bed already?"

"Yes."

"No matter, I must speak to him."

"And I tell you it's impossible."

"But —"

"Stand back!"

"Is it the password you require?"

"I am not obliged to answer you. Stand back!"

And this time the words were accompanied by a threatening gesture; but the stranger kept his position as immovably as if he had been rooted to the spot.

"M. le Mousquetaire," said he, "you are a gentleman?"

"I have that honor."

"And I am one too; now gentlemen ought to have a certain amount of consideration for one another."

The sentry lowered his weapon, vanquished by the dignity with which the words were uttered.

"Speak, monsieur," said he, "and should you ask anything in my power to —"

"Thanks. You have an officer, have you not?"

"Our lieutenant, yes, monsieur."

"Well, I should like to speak to your lieutenant."

"Oh, that is a different matter. Go upstairs, monsieur."

The stranger saluted the sentry with imposing dignity and went up the stairs, while the cry, "Lieutenant, a visit!" passed from sentry to sentry in front of him, and finally broke in on the slumbers of that officer.

After drawing up his boots, rubbing his eyes, and fastening on his cloak, the lieutenant advanced three steps toward the stranger.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" said he.

"You are the officer on duty and the lieutenant of the musketeers, are you not?"

"I have that honor," replied the officer.

"Monsieur, it is absolutely necessary that I speak to the King."

The lieutenant eyed the stranger intently, and the look he

gave him, rapid though it was, showed him all that he expected to see: a man of lofty distinction under that unobtrusive costume.

"I do not for a moment suppose you to be out of your senses, monsieur," he answered, "and yet, from your apparent rank, you ought to be aware that no one enters the King's apartments without his consent."

"He will consent, monsieur."

"Monsieur, permit me to doubt it. The King entered his bed-chamber a quarter of an hour ago; he must now be disrobing. Besides, his Majesty has given the usual orders."

"When he knows who I am," replied the stranger, "he will revoke the orders."

The words impressed the officer as strongly as they surprised him.

"Should I consent to announce you," said he, "I must, at least, know the name of the person I announce, monsieur."

"You will announce his Majesty Charles II., King of England, Ireland, and Scotland!"

The officer started back with a cry of amazement, and there might have been read on his pale face one of the most poignant emotions that a strong man ever struggled to force back into the recesses of his heart.

"Oh, yes, Sire," he exclaimed, "and in good truth I ought to have recognized your Majesty."

"You have seen my portrait?"

"No, Sire."

"Or, perhaps, you saw me formerly at your court before I was expelled from France?"

"No, Sire, it was not then, either."

"How is it you recognize me, then, if you have not seen my portrait and have never met me in person?"

"Sire, I saw the king your father at a terrible moment."

"On the day —"

"Yes."

A dark cloud swept across the prince's forehead, then, recovering himself, he said:

"Do you still see any reason for not announcing me?"

"Sire, forgive me," answered the officer; "I could not conjecture that such a simple outward garb concealed a king; and yet, as I had the honor to tell your Majesty just now, I saw

Charles I. — But pardon me, I must run and inform the King — "

After going a short distance, however, he turned back and said:

"Doubtless your Majesty would wish this interview to be kept secret?"

"I have no wish in the matter; still, if it can be, it would be as well —"

"It can be, Sire, for I need not mention it to the first gentleman in waiting; but, in that case, I shall be compelled to ask your Majesty for your sword."

"You are right. I was forgetting that no one is permitted to enter the bed-chamber of the King of France except he is unarmed."

"Your Majesty will be an exception if you desire to be so; in that case, however, to safeguard my responsibility, I should be obliged to notify the gentlemen in attendance on the King of the fact."

"Here is my sword, monsieur. Will you be kind enough now to announce me to his Majesty?"

"Immediately, Sire."

And the officer ran and knocked at the door of communication, which was opened by a valet de chambre.

"His Majesty the King of England!" said the officer.

"His Majesty the King of England!" repeated the valet.

Thereupon a gentleman threw open the folding doors of the royal bed-chamber, and Louis XIV. advanced toward the threshold, hatless and swordless, his doublet unbuttoned, and in every way manifesting the most intense astonishment.

"You, you at Blois, my brother!" he exclaimed, after a gesture of dismissal to his gentleman and his valet, who retired into the next apartment.

"Sire, I was about to start for Paris," answered Charles II., "in hopes of seeing your Majesty, when the news of your intention to visit Blois reached me. I decided, therefore, to remain in the city, as I had a very confidential communication to make to your Majesty."

"Do you think this apartment suitable for the purpose?"

"Perfectly so, Sire, for I do not believe any one can hear us."

"I have dismissed my gentleman and my night attendant; they are in the next room. Behind yonder partition there is

an empty closet, which opens into the antechamber; you saw no one in the antechamber except an officer, did you?"

"No, Sire."

"Well, then, speak, my brother; I am all attention."

"Sire, I will begin, and oh, that your Majesty would deign to have compassion on the misfortunes of our house!"

The King of France blushed and drew his chair nearer to the King of England.

"Sire," said Charles, "I need not ask your Majesty if you are acquainted with the details of my calamitous history."

Louis XIV. flushed a deeper red than even before. He held out his hand to the English sovereign, and said:

"I am ashamed to have to say it, my brother, but the cardinal seldom speaks of political matters in my presence. Nay, more: formerly I used to have Laporte, my valet de chambre, read historical subjects to me, but he put an end to that and took Laporte away from me. And so, my brother, I must ask you to speak to me about all those matters as if you were speaking to a person who was utterly ignorant of them."

"Very well, Sire; and by going back to the very beginning of my misfortunes, I shall have a better chance of touching your Majesty's heart."

"Do so, my brother, do so, by all means."

"You know, Sire, that I was invited to Edinburgh in 1650, during Cromwell's expedition to Ireland, and crowned at Scone. A year afterward, Cromwell, who had been wounded in one of the provinces he had usurped, came to attack us. I was anxious to take the field against him, and I was equally anxious to get out of Scotland."

"But," interrupted the young King, "Scotland is almost your native country, my brother."

"Yes, but what cruel countrymen were mine! Sire, they forced me to deny the religion of my fathers; they hanged Lord Montrose, my most devoted servant, because he was not a Covenanter; and as the poor martyr, to whom they had offered to grant a favor before his death, had asked that his body should be cut into as many pieces as there were cities in Scotland, that a witness of his loyalty might be met with everywhere, I could not leave one city or enter another without passing under a limb of that body which had worked, fought, and breathed for me.

"By a rapid and daring march I broke through Cromwell's

army and entered England. During this singular flight, the aim of which was to win a crown, I was closely pressed by the Protector. If I could have reached London before him, undoubtedly the prize of the race would have been mine, but he came up with me at Worcester.

"The genius of England was no longer on our side, but on his. Sire, on the third of September, 1651, the anniversary of that battle of Dunbar which had been so fatal to Scotland, I was vanquished. Two thousand men fell around me before I even dreamed of retreating. At last I was compelled to fly.

"Thenceforth my history turns into romance. Pursued with implacable fury, I cut off my hair and disguised myself as a woodcutter. I had to hide one day among the branches of an oak, winning for the tree the title of the Royal Oak, a name it still retains. My adventures in the county of Stafford, whence I escaped by the aid of my host's daughter, who rode on the crupper behind me, are still rehearsed at every fireside and will furnish the theme of many a ballad. Some time or other, Sire, I will write out all this for the instruction of my royal brother.

"I will tell how, on arriving at Mr. Norton's, I met one of my father's chaplains, who was looking on at a game of skittles, and an old servant, who burst into tears and spoke my name aloud; his loyalty was nearly being as fatal to me as would have been the treachery of an enemy. Finally, I will tell of my terror, yes, Sire, my genuine terror, when, at Colonel Windham's, a farrier, who was examining our horses, declared that they must have been shod in the north."

"It is strange," murmured Louis XIV., "I was ignorant of all this. All I knew was that you had sailed from Brighthelmstone and landed in Normandy."

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed Charles, "if it be thy will that kings should be so unversed in one another's history, how are they to afford one another help in their misfortunes!"

"But how is it, my brother," continued Louis XIV., "that, after being so cruelly treated in England, you still base any hopes on that unhappy country and on such a rebellious people?"

"Oh, Sire, since the battle of Worcester everything over yonder has changed. Cromwell is dead, after signing a treaty with France in which he wrote his own name above yours. He died on the 3d of September, 1658, the anniver-

sary of the battle of Worcester as well as of the battle of Dunbar."

"His son has succeeded him."

"Certain men have families, but not heirs, Sire. Oliver's heritage was too heavy for Richard — Richard, who was neither republican nor a royalist; Richard, who let his guards eat his dinners and his generals govern the commonwealth. Richard resigned the protectorate on the 22d of April, 1659, a little more than a year ago, Sire.

"Ever since, England has been simply a gamblers' den, in which the players throw dice for the crown of my father, and the most eager players are Monk and Lambert. Well, I, too, Sire, should wish to take a hand in this game, the stakes for which are flung on my royal mantle. Sire, with a million I can purchase one of these gamblers, and turn him into an ally; or with two hundred of your gentlemen I can drive them both from my palace of Whitehall, as Jesus drove the money-changers from his temple."

"And so," replied Louis XIV., "you have come to ask —"

"Your help; not only such help as kings owe to kings, but the help which Christians owe to Christians; your help, Sire, in money or in men; your help, Sire, and in a month, whether I pit Lambert against Monk, or Monk against Lambert, I shall have won back the heritage of my fathers without the cost of a single guinea to my country or of a single drop of their blood to my subjects; for they are now drunk with revolutions, protectorates, and republics, and all they want is to stagger into the arms of royalty and fall asleep there. Your help, Sire, and I shall be more indebted to your Majesty than I am to my father. Poor father! who bought at such a price the ruin of his house! See, Sire, how unhappy, how desperate I must be, when I upbraid my father!"

And the blood surged to the pale face of Charles II., who for a moment hid his head in his hands, blinded as it were by that blood which seemed to rebel against this filial blasphemy.

The young King was quite as distressed as his elder brother. He moved about restlessly in his chair and was evidently at a loss for an answer.

At length Charles II., his senior by ten years and therefore gifted with greater capacity for mastering his emotions, regained his self-control.

"Your answer, Sire," he said; "I await it as the criminal does his sentence. Is that sentence death?"

"My brother," answered the French prince, "you ask me for a million — me! Why, I have never possessed a quarter of that sum! In fact, I possess nothing! I am no more King of France than you are King of England. I am a name, a cipher arrayed in velvet robes upon which the lilies of France have been embroidered; that depicts my situation. The throne I sit on is visible, and that is the only advantage I have over your Majesty. I am poor, and I am powerless."

"Can this be true?" cried Charles II.

"My brother," said Louis, lowering his voice, "I have endured privations to which the most indigent among my gentlemen were strangers. If poor Laporte were here he could tell you that I have slept in tattered sheets, which failed to cover my legs; he could tell you that, later on, whenever I asked for a carriage, the carriage brought me would be some old vehicle, almost gnawed to pieces by the rats in my livery stables; he could tell you that, when I asked for my dinner, a messenger was sent to the cardinal's kitchens to find out if there was anything left for the King to eat. Nay further, even now, when I am twenty-two years old; even now, when I have arrived at that age at which all great kings have reached their majority; even now, when I ought to have the keys of my treasury, the direction of state affairs, and the supreme power in peace and war — look around and see what is left me; see the loneliness, neglect, and silence apportioned to me here, and then look yonder! Notice the dazzling illuminations, notice the assiduous homage that is paid in that quarter! Yonder, look you, my brother, yonder is where the real sovereign of France resides!"

"In the apartments of the cardinal?"

"Yes, in the apartments of the cardinal."

"Then I am sentenced, Sire."

Louis XIV. made no answer.

"Sentenced, in good truth, Sire, for I will never ask a favor of the man who would have let my mother and my sister — the daughter and the granddaughter of Henri IV. — die of cold and hunger had not the Parliament of Paris and M. de Retz supplied them with wood and bread."

"Die!" murmured Louis XIV.

"Well, poor Charles II., like yourself, Sire, a grandson of

Henri IV., — as no parliament or Cardinal de Retz is likely to come to his aid, — will die of hunger, that death from which his mother and sister had such a narrow escape."

Louis knitted his brow, violently clutching at the lace on his ruffles.

His evident prostration and his vain efforts to hide an emotion that was plainly visible at last struck King Charles, who took the young man's hand.

"I thank you, my brother," said he; "you have shown that you pity me; it is all I could expect from you in your present situation."

"Sire," exclaimed Louis suddenly, raising his head, "you said, I think, you needed a million, or else two hundred gentlemen?"

"Sire, a million is all I require."

"But it is very little."

"Offered to a single man, it is very considerable. Even men with honest convictions have been bought for less, and the men I have to deal with are venal."

"And don't you think two hundred gentlemen a very small number? It is hardly more than a single company."

"Sire, there is a tradition in our family that four men, four French gentlemen, devoted to my father, were very near saving that father, though he had been condemned by a parliament, was guarded by an army, and surrounded by a nation."

"Then, if I am able to secure you a million, or two hundred gentlemen, you will be satisfied and regard me as your good and loving brother?"

"I will regard you as my savior, and should I ascend my father's throne, England, at least so long as I sit on that throne, shall be a sister to France, as you have been a brother to me."

"Well, my brother, that which you shrink from asking, I will myself ask! What I have never done for my own sake I will do for yours. I will go to France's other king, her rich and potent king, and will entreat him to grant me that million, or these two hundred gentlemen, and we 'll see!"

"Oh!" cried Charles, "you are a noble friend, Sire, and have a godlike heart! Yes, my brother, you are my savior, and should you ever stand in need of the life you are restoring me, demand it!"

"Hush, my brother, hush!" said Louis in an undertone.

"Take care that you are not heard. We have not yet succeeded. Ask money of Mazarin! It is worse than forcing a way through that enchanted forest in whose every tree dwelt a demon! It is worse than attempting to conquer the world!"

"But, Sire, when *you* ask —"

"I told you already I have never asked," answered Louis, with a haughtiness that banished the color from the cheeks of Charles.

But as the English monarch, like one who had been stung to the heart, turned away, apparently with the intention of retiring, Louis resumed:

"Forgive me, my brother; I forgot that I do not know what it is to have a mother or a sister in want; my throne may be hard and bare, but I am firmly seated on my throne. Forgive me, my brother, and do not upbraid me with the words I have just uttered: they were selfish words, and so I will expiate them by a sacrifice. I will wait on the cardinal. Do me the favor to remain here. I will soon return."

CHAPTER X.

M. DE MAZARIN'S ARITHMETIC.

While the King, attended by his valet de chambre, was proceeding rapidly to the wing of the castle occupied by the cardinal, the officer of the musketeers, breathing hard, like a man who had been forced to hold in his breath for some time, came out from the little closet of which we have spoken and which the King believed vacant. This closet had once formed a portion of the bed-chamber, and was only separated from it by a thin partition. But though this partition prevented the eye from seeing, it did not prevent the ear from hearing, and the most scrupulous person in the world could not help learning what was going on in the next apartment.

It could hardly be doubted, then, that the lieutenant of musketeers was informed of all that had occurred in the royal bed-chamber.

Taking a hint from the last words of the young sovereign, he hurried out and was just in time to salute as he passed and watch him until he disappeared in the corridor.

Then, when the King was no longer in sight, he shook his head in a way peculiar to him, and in a voice that still retained the Gascon accent, although he had spent forty years out of Gascony, murmured:

"A poor service and a poor master!"

And, having uttered these words, he sat down again in his elbow-chair, stretched his limbs, and closed his eyes, like a man who was either sleeping or meditating.

During this short monologue and the incidents associated with it, and while the King was passing through the long corridors of the old castle on his way to see Mazarin, a scene of quite a different character was taking place in the room of the cardinal.

Mazarin had gone to bed, suffering somewhat from the gout; but as he happened to be a methodical person who had discovered a way of making even his sufferings useful, he compelled his sleeplessness to be the humble slave of his toil. And so he had ordered his valet, Bernouin, to bring him his little travelling-desk, as he wished to write while in bed.

But the gout is not an easily vanquished enemy, and every one of his movements had the effect of changing the dull pain into an acute one.

"Is not Brienne here?" he asked Bernouin.

"No, monseigneur," answered his valet. "M. de Brienne had your permission to retire; but, if your Eminence wish, there will be no trouble in awaking him."

"No, it is not worth while. Let me see — Oh, those infernal figures!"

And the cardinal at once fell to counting on his fingers.

"Figures, is it?" exclaimed Bernouin. "Good! If your Eminence meddles with those ciphers of yours I promise you the neatest headache to-morrow you ever had in your life! And, along with that, you have no M. Guénaud here to relieve you."

"You are right, Bernouin. Well, you'll take the place of Brienne, my friend. In good truth, I should have brought M. de Colbert with me. That young man knows a thing or two, Bernouin; he knows the value of order. system. does that young fellow."

"I know nothing about that," answered the valet, "but I don't fancy the face of that young man of yours, who knows a thing or two."

"That will do, Bernouin. No one is asking for your opinion. There, sit down, take your pen, and write."

"Very well, monseigneur. What am I to write?"

"Look — there — following the two lines written already."

"I see them."

"Write: *Seven hundred and sixty thousand livres.*"

"Done."

"*On Lyons* —"

The cardinal was apparently hesitating.

"On Lyons," repeated Bernouin.

"*Three million nine hundred thousand livres.*"

"It's written, monseigneur."

"*On Bordeaux, seven millions.*"

"Seven," repeated Bernouin.

"Eh? — yes, seven," said the cardinal, crossly. "Of course, Bernouin," he added, "you know all this money is to be expended by the King."

"Oh, monseigneur, whether expended or hoarded, it does not bother me; none of these millions are likely to come my way."

"These millions are the King's; it is the King's money I am reckoning. Stay — where were we? You're always interrupting me."

"At, 'on Bordeaux, seven millions.'"

"Ah, yes, you're right. *On Madrid, four.* The reason why I explained to you, Bernouin, that this is the King's money is because everybody is so silly as to believe that I own millions. I scorn such blockheads. A minister has nothing of his own. But continue: *Revenue receipts, seven millions. Properties, nine millions.* Is that down, Bernouin?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"*Stocks, six hundred thousand livres; bills of different kinds, two millions.* Ah, I was forgetting, *furniture of the different palaces* —"

"Shall I write 'palaces of the crown'?" inquired Bernouin.

"No, not necessary; that's understood. You have everything down, Bernouin?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And the figures are —"

"In a straight line under one another."

"Add them up, Bernouin."

"Thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand livres, monseigneur."

"Ah!" cried the cardinal, querulously, "not forty millions yet!"

Bernouin went over the figures again.

"No, monseigneur, there are seven hundred and forty thousand livres still lacking."

Mazarin asked for the account and read it carefully.

"Yes, but for all that," said Bernouin, "thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand livres are not to be despised."

"Ah, Bernouin, I only wish the King had them."

"But your Eminence told me this money belonged to his Majesty."

"Oh, there is no doubt at all about that. But these thirty-nine millions are mortgaged, and a good many more besides!"

Bernouin, while preparing the cardinal's night draught and settling his pillows, had his usual smile on his face, the smile of a person who believes only what he feels like believing.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mazarin, when his valet had withdrawn, "not yet forty millions! and yet I have set my mind on amassing forty-five millions and must get them. But who knows whether I shall have time? I am going fast, I am not long for this world, and may never reach the figure. Still, why should I not find two or three millions in the pockets of our good friends the Spaniards? They discovered Peru, they did, and the very devil 's in it if there 's not something left them out of it all."

While he was indulging in this soliloquy, so absorbed in his calculations that he entirely forgot his gout, which, indeed, always retreated when the cardinal was under the influence of his most dominant passion, Bernouin hurried into the room, looking quite scared.

"Eh? what is the matter?" asked the cardinal.

"The King, monseigneur, the King!"

"What! the King?" exclaimed Mazarin, quickly concealing the paper. "The King here! and at this hour! I thought he was in bed long ago. What has happened?"

Louis XIV. heard the last words and saw the frightened gestures of the cardinal as he sat up in bed, for he entered the room at that very moment.

"Nothing has happened, M. le Cardinal, or, at least, nothing that should alarm you. I simply wanted to communi-

cate a very important piece of news to your Eminence to-night."

Mazarin's thoughts at once recurred to the close attention paid by the King to his remarks regarding Mademoiselle de Mancini, and this communication must, he fancied, be connected with that incident. His serenity was restored immediately and all his charm of manner along with it. The young King noticed this sudden change with great delight; as soon as Louis was seated the cardinal said:

"Sire, I ought, certainly, to listen to your Majesty standing; but I have had such a painful attack of—"

"No ceremony between us, M. le Cardinal," said Louis, affectionately. "You know well I am your pupil rather than your King, and to-night especially, for I have come to you as a petitioner, a suppliant, and a suppliant who is very humble and very anxious to be well received."

Mazarin was confirmed in his first idea by seeing the King's heightened color; he was sure that these fine words were a mask for thoughts of love. But for once in his life the crafty statesman was deceived. The prince's blushes did not spring from the bashful emotions of juvenile passion, but from the painful curb self-imposed on kingly pride.

Like a good uncle, Mazarin decided to render a confession on the prince's part easy.

"Speak, Sire," said he; "and since your Majesty has been graciously pleased to forget for a moment that I am your subject in order to honor me with the title of your teacher and instructor, you will permit me to say in return that the sentiment I experience for your Majesty is of the most devoted and affectionate character."

"Thanks, M. le Cardinal," answered the King. "The favor I am about to ask of your Eminence is, moreover, one which you can easily grant."

"So much the worse," returned the cardinal, "so much the worse. I should have liked if your Majesty had asked something important, something requiring a sacrifice on my part. But, whatever be the nature of your request, it will give me pleasure to set your heart at ease by complying with it."

"Then I may as well tell you the object of my visit," said the King, his heart throbbing at a rate that was almost equalled by the pulsations of the heart of the minister. "I have just received a visit from my brother the King of England."

If Mazarin himself had received an electric shock he could not have bounded higher in his bed than he did; at the same time, his surprise, or rather his evident disappointment, lit up his face with such an angry glare that, though Louis XIV. was not much of a diplomatist, he saw plainly his minister had expected quite a different announcement.

"Charles II.!" cried Mazarin hoarsely, and with a disdainful curl of his lips. "You have received a visit from Charles II.?"

"From *King* Charles II.," retorted Louis XIV., emphatically, determined to accord to the grandson of Henri IV. the title which Mazarin forgot to give him. "Yes, M. le Cardinal, that ill-fated prince has wrung my heart with the tale of his misfortunes. He is in the greatest distress, M. le Cardinal, and it hurts me to think that I who have witnessed an assault made on my throne, that I who have been compelled to abandon my capital in times of public disorder, that I, in a word, who have known what it is to suffer, should have to refuse my aid to an impoverished and fugitive brother."

"Well!" said the cardinal, rancorously, "why had he not, like you, a Jules Mazarin near him? Depend upon it, his crown would have been safe enough on his head then."

"I am aware of all my house owes to your Eminence," haughtily rejoined the King, "and you may rest assured, monsieur, that for my part I am not likely to forget it. It is exactly because my brother, the King of England, has not near him a statesman endowed with the invincible genius which has been my salvation that I wish to win the aid of that genius for his cause and beg you to stretch your arm over his head, being assured, M. le Cardinal, that if your hand but touch that head, it shall again wear the crown that fell at the foot of a father's scaffold."

"Sire," replied Mazarin, "I am grateful for your good opinion, but we really can do nothing with those people; they are lunatics who deny God and cut off the heads of their kings. They are dangerous, Sire, and they soil any hand that touches them ever since they wallowed in royal blood and in the slime of their covenant. Their mode of government does not please me and I will have nothing to do with it."

"The more reason why you should help him to replace it by another system!"

"What other system?"

"The system that would be established after Charles II.'s restoration, of course."

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed Mazarin, "and does the poor wretch amuse himself with such a fantastic dream as that?"

"Undoubtedly he does," replied the young King, dismayed by the obstacles which his omniscient minister saw in the way of the project; "and for the successful prosecution of his enterprise he asks only a million."

"Really? Only a million, a little million, if you please!" rejoined the cardinal, ironically, and dropping into his Italian accent. "Won't you give me a little million, if you please, my brother? Oh, what a family of beggars!"

"Cardinal," said Louis XIV., haughtily raising his head, "this family of beggars is a branch of my family."

"Are you so rich, Sire, that you can bestow millions on others? Have you the millions?"

"Oh!" replied Louis XIV., preventing, by a strong exertion of his will, the painful emotions that affected him from appearing on his features; "oh, yes! M. le Cardinal, I know that I am poor; but the crown of France is, at least, well worth a million, and, in order to be able to perform a good action I am ready, if necessary, to pledge my crown. I can find Jews who will lend me a million."

"So, Sire, you say you require a million?" asked Mazarin.

"Yes, monsieur, I say so."

"You are making a great mistake, Sire, for you require much more than that. Bernouin!"

"What does this mean, cardinal?" said the King. "Are you going to consult a lackey on the condition of my affairs?"

"Bernouin!" repeated the cardinal, apparently not noticing the humiliation of the young prince. "Come here, my friend, and tell us the amount of the sum I ordered you to add up a few moments ago."

"Cardinal, cardinal, did you not hear me?" said Louis, pale with indignation.

"Do not get angry, Sire; I carry on your Majesty's business above-board; every one in France knows that, for my books are open to inspection. What did I ask you to do lately, Bernouin?"

"Your Eminence asked me to cast up an account."

"You did so, did you not?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And I asked you to do so with the object of finding out how much his Majesty stands in need of at present. Did I not say so? Be frank, my friend."

"You did, monseigneur."

"Well, what was the amount he required?"

"Forty-five millions, I think."

"And after enumerating all the resources within our reach, how much did we make out?"

"Thirty-nine millions two hundred and sixty thousand livres."

"That will do, Bernouin, that is all I wanted to know; leave us now," said the cardinal, fixing his piercing eyes on the King, who was dumb with amazement.

"But yet —" stammered Louis.

"Ah! you are still in doubt, Sire," returned the cardinal. "Well, now for the proof of my statement."

And Mazarin drew from under the bolster the document upon which there were so many figures, and handed it to the King. The young prince was too ill at ease to care to look at it; he turned away his head.

"So, Sire, as you want a million, and as that million is certainly not there, the sum needed by your Majesty is forty-six millions. Well, there is not a Jew in the world could lend such a sum, though you pledged him the crown of France."

The King's hands shook convulsively under his ruffles; he pushed back his chair.

"It cannot be helped, I suppose," said he, "and my brother of England must, therefore, die of hunger."

"Sire," replied Mazarin, "keep in mind this proverb, which I repeat in your presence because it is an epitome of the soundest policy: 'Be satisfied with your poverty when your neighbor is poor also.'"

Louis paused in thought for a few moments, casting an inquisitive glance at the paper, an end of which peeped from under the bolster.

"So you find it impossible to comply with my request for money, M. le Cardinal?"

"Absolutely impossible, Sire."

"You have not thought that this policy of yours might gain me an enemy later on, should this prince win back his throne without my aid?"

"If that is all your Majesty is afraid of, you may rest easy," answered the cardinal, quickly.

"Enough, I will not urge the matter further," said Louis XIV.

"But have I, at least, convinced you?" laying his hand on that of the King.

"Perfectly."

"Anything else you ask for, Sire, I shall be most happy to grant, especially as I had to refuse you this."

"Anything else, monsieur?"

"Of course; am I not devoted, heart and soul, to your Majesty's service? Ho there! Bernouin, torches and guards for his Majesty. His Majesty is returning to his apartments."

"Not yet, monsieur, and since you are so willing to oblige me, I will take advantage of your kindness."

"But for yourself, Sire?" inquired the cardinal, hoping that at last he would speak of his niece.

"No, monsieur, not for myself," replied Louis, "but still for my brother Charles."

Mazarin's face darkened, and he growled out some words the King did not hear.

CHAPTER XI.

M. DE MAZARIN'S POLICY.

Instead of the hesitation that marked the King's intercourse with the cardinal a quarter of an hour before, there might now be read in the young monarch's eyes a resolve which might be withstood, might, perhaps, be shattered by its own impotence, but which was sure to keep, deep down in the heart, the memory of its defeat as an open wound.

"This time, M. le Cardinal, it will be easier finding what I am in search of than finding a million."

"You think so, Sire?" answered the cardinal, gazing at him with those cunning eyes that pierced through men's souls.

"Yes, I think so, and when you are aware of the object of my request —"

"And you think, Sire, I am not aware of it already?"

"Aware of what I am about to say to you?"

"Listen, Sire; these were the very words of King Charles —"

"Oh, that is going a little too far."

"Listen. 'If that miser, that miscreant,' he said —"

"M. le Cardinal!"

"His meaning, though, perhaps, not his precise words. Gracious heavens! I do not bear him the slightest grudge on account of that, Sire; every one sees things through the medium of his passions. Well, then, he said: 'If that miscreant of an Italian refuse you the million we need, Sire, and if we be compelled to abandon diplomacy from lack of money, ask him for five hundred gentlemen'—"

The King started; the cardinal was only mistaken as to the number.

"So I am right, Sire, am I not?" cried the minister, triumphantly. "Then he indulged in some high-flown phrases. He said: 'I have friends on the other side of the channel, and these friends need only a leader and a banner. As soon as they see me, as soon as they behold the banner of France, they will flock to my standard, for they will know I have your support. The colors of the French uniform will be as helpful to my cause as the million M. de Mazarin will probably refuse me.' Oh, he knew well I should refuse him his million! 'With these five hundred gentlemen I shall be victorious, and all the honor, Sire, will be yours.' Is not that what he said, or, at least, very like what he said, Sire? Of course he tricked out his words with brilliant metaphor and pompous imagery, for they are a garrulous family. The father prated even on the scaffold!"

The King was so ashamed and angry that drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He felt that this insult to his brother in his presence was an outrage on his dignity, but he had not the courage yet to venture on a struggle with the man who made every one bend before him, even his mother.

At length he said with an effort:

"But, M. le Cardinal, it is not five hundred men, it is two hundred."

"Aye, but you see I guessed what he asked."

"I never denied your wonderful penetration, monsieur; and that is one of the reasons why I concluded you would not refuse my brother Charles a favor so easily granted, and, moreover, a favor requested in my name, M. le Cardinal, rather than in his."

"Sire," answered Mazarin, "I have been carrying out a

certain system of policy for the last thirty years; at first in connection with Cardinal de Richelieu, afterward alone. I am obliged to confess that this policy has not always been honest, but it has never been short-sighted. Now, the policy your Majesty is thinking of adopting is both dishonest and short-sighted."

"Dishonest, monsieur?"

"Sire, you made a treaty with Cromwell, did you not?"

"Yes; and in this very treaty Cromwell signed his name above mine."

"Why did you sign yours so low down, Sire? Cromwell found a good place and took it; it is his way, rather. But to return to the subject under discussion, you made a treaty with Cromwell, that is to say, with England, for when you signed the treaty with Cromwell, Cromwell was England."

"Cromwell is dead."

"You are sure, Sire?"

"There is no doubt about it, for his son Richard succeeded him and afterward abdicated."

"Ah, yes, perfectly correct. Richard succeeded his father, and when Richard abdicated, England succeeded Richard. Now the treaty was a part of that succession, whether it was in the hands of Richard or of England. The treaty, therefore, always holds good, is always as valid as ever. Why should you evade it, Sire? What is changed? Charles II. desires to get possession now of that which we did not wish him to get possession of ten years ago. The contingency has been foreseen. You are the ally of England, Sire, and not of Charles II. From a family point of view, no doubt, it was scarcely honorable to sign a treaty with a man who cut off the head of your father's brother-in-law, and to contract an alliance with a parliament which is known among them as the Rump Parliament; but from a political point of view it was anything but short-sighted, since, thanks to this treaty, I saved your Majesty during your minority from the perils of a foreign war which the Fronde (you remember the Fronde, Sire)" — the young prince bent his head — "might have rendered fatal to your throne. I have now laid before your Majesty the reasons why a change of policy at present, especially without giving notice of it to our allies, would be shortsighted as well as dishonest. If we make war we shall be the aggressors; if we make war we do so knowing that we deserve to be beaten, and while

provoking it we shall look as if we feared it; for a permission thoroughly granted to five hundred men, or two hundred, or fifty, or ten, is always a permission. A single Frenchman is the French nation; a single uniform is the French army. Suppose, Sire, that you have a war with Holland, some time or other — and some time or other you are sure to have one — or with Spain, which is not unlikely, if this marriage be broken off," — here Mazarin glanced keenly at the King, — "in that case how would you feel if England sent to the United Provinces or to the Infanta a single regiment, a single company, nay, even a squad of English gentlemen? Would you consider that England was keeping within the limits of her treaty of alliance?"

Louis listened attentively. It seemed so strange to him that Mazarin, the author of all those fraudulent schemes that were known as Mazarinades, should appeal to his good faith.

"But," said he, at length, "without publicly authorizing them to do so, I cannot hinder gentlemen belonging to my states from crossing over to England, if they choose to do so."

"You should force them to return, or else, at the very least, protest against their presence as enemies in a country with which you are allied."

"Well, come now, M. le Cardinal, surely a statesman of your profound genius can find some way of assisting this poor prince and yet not endanger our friendly relations with England."

"But that is the very thing I do not wish to do, my dear liege," said Mazarin. "If England were acting in compliance with my express desire, she would not act differently; if I were able to control England's political affairs from this very spot, I should make no change in the present situation. Governed as she is governed, England will be constantly running a tilt against the rest of Europe. Holland protects Charles II. — let Holland do so; she and England are sure to lose their tempers and come to blows. They are the only two sea powers — let them destroy each other's navies; we 'll build ours from the wrecks of their vessels, that is, as soon as we have money enough to buy the nails."

"Oh! how contemptible, how shabby is everything you are saying to me, M. le Cardinal!"

"Yes, but how true, Sire! However, I have something further to add. Admitting for the moment that you break

your word and elude the treaty — oh, that often happens, when some great interest is at stake or the contract is found to be too embarrassing — well! you do what you have been asked to do; France, or her flag — which is the same thing — will pass over the straits and will fight; France will be conquered."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because we'll have such an able general in the person of his Majesty Charles II.; Worcester has given us his measure!"

"But he will not have to meet Cromwell this time, monsieur."

"Yes, but he will have to meet Monk, a man quite as dangerous, though in a different style. The honest brewer of whom we have been speaking was a fanatic; in his moments of irrepressible enthusiasm, when he fermented, expanded, he cracked like an over-full hogshead, and through the chinks a few drops of his thoughts trickled out, and from the sample you could give a pretty good guess as to the nature of the entire thoughts themselves. In this way Cromwell has, more than half a score of times, laid bare that soul of his, even when you believed it encased in triple bronze, as Horace says. But Monk! Ah, Sire, may God preserve you from ever having any political dealings with Monk! I am indebted to him during the past year for every gray hair I have in my head! Monk, unfortunately, is no fanatic; he is a statesman; he does not expand, he contracts. For ten years he has had his eyes fixed on a certain goal, but what that goal is no one can guess. He has taken the advice of Louis XI. and burns his nightcap every morning. And so, when his plan, which has slowly ripened in solitude, springs suddenly into the sunlight, it will be accompanied by all the conditions that in every case insure success to the unexpected.

"Such is Monk, Sire, a man you never heard of, a man whose very name you were, perhaps, unacquainted with, until your brother Charles II., who has good reason to know what he is, mentioned it in your presence. Monk happens to be endowed in a marvellous degree with the only two qualities against which ardor and intellect dash themselves in vain: depth and tenacity. Sire, I have had a certain amount of ardor when I was young, and I still have a certain amount of intellect. I may boast of the latter, since it is one of the

things for which I am reproached. With these two qualities I have opened for myself a fine career, for, though the son of a fisherman of Piscina, I have become prime minister of the King of France, a position in which your Majesty has deigned to acknowledge I have rendered some services to your Majesty's throne. Well, Sire, if I had encountered Monk, instead of Beaufort, Retz, or Monsieur le Prince, on my way, we should have been ruined! Do not enter into any rash engagement, except you want to fall under the talons of this statesman soldier. The helmet of Monk, Sire, is an iron coffer, in the depths of which he has locked up his thoughts, and no one has ever found a key for it. Consequently, Sire, I, who have no head-covering except a velvet baretta, bow before him."

"What do you think Monk intends doing?"

"Oh, if I knew that, Sire, I would tell you not to fear him, for I should be stronger than he. But where he is concerned I am afraid to guess; and why, do you think? Because when I fancy I have guessed at an idea, it engrosses me; I cannot help myself, I have to follow out that idea. Ever since that man has been in power yonder I have resembled those lost souls in Dante whose necks have been twisted round by Satan and who move forward but look backward. Though I am going in the direction of Madrid, I keep my eyes always fixed on London. To guess, when you are dealing with that devil of a man, is to fall wide of the mark; and to fall wide of the mark is to be lost. God forbid I should ever try to guess his intentions; it is quite enough for me to be able to keep an eye on his actions. But I believe — you understand the limited significance of that 'I believe'; an 'I believe,' in connection with Monk, does not bind you — I believe he has made up his mind to be Cromwell's successor. Your Charles II. has already sent him half a score of ambassadors with proposals; he has been content to drive away these ten go-betweens, simply saying, 'Begone, or I will have you hanged!' At present, Monk would seem to be devoted to the Rump Parliament; but I am not the dupe of this devotion of his, I assure you; Monk does not care to be assassinated. An assassination would arrest him in the midst of his work, and his work must be accomplished. So, I believe, Sire; but do not believe what I believe; I say 'I believe' from habit. I believe Monk will show the utmost deference for the parliament until he is ready to crush it. And you are asked to allow some of your

gentlemen to draw their swords against Monk. God forbid we should fight against Monk, Sire, for Monk would beat us, and if we were beaten by Monk I could never get over it during the rest of my life! I should say to myself that Monk foresaw that victory ten years ago. In God's name, Sire, tell Charles II. to keep quiet, if not for your sake, at least for his own. Your Majesty can allow him a small income, you can give him one of your castles — Eh! stop a moment! Ah, I remember; unfortunately the treaty, the famous treaty of which we have just been speaking, deprives you of the right of giving him even a castle!"

"How is that?"

"Yes, yes, it binds your Majesty not to give hospitality to King Charles, and even to expel him from France. That was the reason why we invited him to leave the country, and now he has come back — Sire, I hope you will show your brother that he cannot remain among us, that it is impossible for him to do so, as he compromises us, or I myself —"

"Enough, monsieur," said Louis XIV., rising. "You have the right to refuse me a million: your millions are your own; you have also the right to refuse me two hundred gentlemen, for you are prime minister, and you are responsible in the eyes of France for peace or war. But when you claim to have the right to prevent me, me the King, from offering hospitality to the grandson of Henri IV., my own first cousin and the playmate of my childhood! — at that point your power ends and my authority begins."

"Sire," said Mazarin, enchanted at getting off so cheaply, for the ardor with which he had faced the King had this end solely in view, "Sire, I will always bow before the authority of my sovereign; let my sovereign, therefore, keep the King of England at his side or in one of his castles; but, though Mazarin may know this, do not let the minister know it."

"Good night, monsieur," said Louis XIV., "I am leaving you with despair in my heart."

"But convinced that I am right, Sire; that is all I need," answered Mazarin.

The King did not reply; he retired, sadly and thoughtfully, not at all convinced of the truth of everything mentioned by Mazarin, but, on the other hand, convinced of a fact which he was careful not to make known to the cardinal, and that was that he must begin to give serious attention to his own affairs

and to those of Europe, both of which seemed to him very puzzling and obscure.

Louis found the King of England sitting in the place where he had left him.

The English prince rose as soon as he saw him; but a single glance showed him the disappointment that was written in gloomy letters on the brow of his cousin.

Then, to render it easier for Louis to make his painful confession, he was the first to break silence.

"Whatever answer you bring me," he said, "I can never forget the friendship and affection of which you have given me so many proofs."

"Alas!" answered Louis XIV., in a hollow voice, "all my good intentions, my brother, have been barren."

Charles II. turned frightfully pale, pressed an icy hand against his forehead, and wrestled for a moment or so with a dizziness that made him stagger.

"I understand," said he at length; "there is no more hope!"

Louis seized his hand. "Wait, my brother," said he, "do not do anything rash; things will change; causes are often ruined by the adoption of desperate resolutions. Endure for another year the trials you have already endured for so many years. There is no more reason or opportunity for acting now than at some other time. Come with me, my brother; you shall have one of my residences, and can select the one you prefer. We will keep our attention fixed on events and be prepared to turn them to account. Have courage, my brother."

Charles freed his hand from that of the King, and stepping back to salute him with more ceremony:

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, Sire," said he, "but I have prayed in vain to the greatest king on earth; I go now to ask a miracle of God."

And, not wishing to listen any further, he passed out, his head erect, his hand trembling; his noble features were contracted with pain, and there was a sombre look in his eyes which seemed to proclaim that, hopeless of human succor, he would now appeal for help to a world beyond the world of men.

When the officer of musketeers saw him pass he bent in salutation almost to his knees.

He then took a torch, summoned two musketeers, and escorted the unhappy monarch down the deserted stairs, hold-

ing in his left hand his hat, the plumes of which swept the steps.

When he reached the door, he requested the King to inform him in what direction he proposed to go, as the musketeers would accompany him thither.

"Monsieur," answered Charles, in an undertone, "you knew my father, perhaps you have prayed for him. If so, do not forget me either in your prayers. And now I wish to depart alone; do not, I beg of you, accompany me or have others accompany me any further."

The officer bowed and sent the musketeers back into the palace.

But he himself remained under the porch and watched Charles until the King was lost in the depths and shadows of a winding street.

"If Athos were here," he murmured, "he would cry to him, as he once did to his father: 'Hail to fallen majesty!'"

Then, mounting the stairs:

"Oh! what a degrading service is mine!" he repeated at every step, "and oh! what a wretched master! This life is no longer endurable, and I must change it! Generosity, energy, are things of the past," he continued. "Well! the master has been successful and has turned his pupil into a poor, worn-out creature. *Mordioux!* I will not hold out any longer. I say, you fellows," he went on, after entering the antechamber, "what do you mean by staring at me? Put out the lights and go back to your posts. Ah, but you have to guard me, to watch over me, have you? You brainless idiots! I am not the Duc de Guise. Away with you; no one will assassinate me in the little corridor. And if any one did," he muttered, "it would, at least, show there was some vitality still in the world. But there has been nothing of the sort since the death of Cardinal de Richelieu. Ah! say what you like about him, he was a man! My mind is made up, and to-morrow I throw off my uniform!"

Then, apparently altering his mind:

"No," said he, "not yet awhile. I have one more grand trial to make, and I'll make it; but, *mordioux!* I swear it will be the last."

Before he had entirely finished, a voice came from the King's bedroom.

"M. le Lieutenant!" said the voice.

"Here," was the answer.

"The King wishes to speak with you."

"Odds!" said the lieutenant; "perhaps he wants to speak to me about the very thing of which I have been thinking."

And he entered the King's chamber.

CHAPTER XII.

THE KING AND THE LIEUTENANT.

When the King saw the officer coming up to him he dismissed his valet de chambre and his gentlemen.

"Who is on duty to-morrow, monsieur?" he asked.

The lieutenant bowed with soldierly politeness, and answered:

"I, Sire."

"What! you again?"

"I always."

"And how does that come to pass, monsieur?"

"Sire, when you travel the musketeers furnish all the guards in your Majesty's household, namely, yours, the queen mother's, and those required by M. le Cardinal, who borrows from your Majesty the best or rather the largest part of your royal guard."

"But during the intervals when you are not on duty?"

"There are no such intervals, Sire, except for twenty or thirty men who rest when the others are at their posts. At the Louvre it is different, and in the Louvre I should rest while my corporal was on duty; but, on a journey of this kind, no one knows what may happen and I prefer to attend to my duty in person."

"And so you are on guard every day?"

"And every night; yes, Sire."

"Monsieur, I cannot permit such a thing; you must take some rest."

"You are very kind, Sire, but I will not do so."

"What do you mean, monsieur?" said the King, unable at first to understand the meaning of the answer.

"I mean, Sire, that I will not run the risk of committing an

error. If the devil wanted to play a trick on me he would, knowing the man with whom he had to deal, you see, Sire, select the very moment when I was not at hand. Consequently, my duty and the peace of my conscience take the lead of everything else."

"But such drudgery will kill you, monsieur."

"Oh, as for that, Sire, I have been accustomed to the drudgery for thirty-five years, and there is not a man in France or Navarre as hale as I am. But, Sire, I must entreat you not to concern yourself about me. Such concern would make me feel very queer, seeing that I have not been used to it."

The King changed the conversation and asked:

"So you 'll be here to-morrow morning, then?"

"As usual; yes, Sire."

The King then took a few turns up and down the room; it was plain to be seen that he was eager to speak, but that some fear or other prevented him.

The lieutenant, his hat in one hand and the other planted firmly on his hip, looked on at these evolutions, and while he did so, grumbled to himself as he bit his mustache.

"He has no backbone; upon my honor, he has n't; I 'll bet any amount he does not speak."

The King went on walking, now and then eyeing the lieutenant askance. "His father all over!" continued the latter, still talking to himself; "arrogant, miserly, and timid. Confound his master, say I!"

Louis halted.

"Lieutenant," said he.

"Here, Sire."

"Why did you shout to-night, over there in the hall, 'On his Majesty's service, his Majesty's musketeers'?"

"Because you ordered me to do so Sire."

"I?"

"Yourself."

"Why, monsieur, I did not speak a single word to you!"

"Sire, an order may be given as plainly and clearly by a sign, a gesture, a wink as by a word. A servant who has only ears is but half a servant."

"You must have very piercing eyes, monsieur."

"Why, Sire?"

"Because they can see what does n't exist."

"Your Majesty is correct; my eyes, although they have

long served their owner very industriously, are good, and when they are bound to look, they take good care to see. Now, to-night they saw that from the efforts you were making to keep from yawning, your Majesty had become as red as scarlet; they saw the eloquent looks of entreaty you addressed, first to his Eminence, then to her Majesty the queen mother, and lastly to the door of entrance; so plainly did they take note of all this that they could even perceive your Majesty's lips forming these words: 'Who will enable me to escape out of this place?'"

"Monsieur!"

"Or, if not that, Sire, it was: 'My musketeers!' Then I did not hesitate for a moment. The look, the words, were for me. I shouted immediately: 'His Majesty's musketeers!' And, moreover, the truth of what I state is confirmed by the fact that your Majesty, so far from finding fault with my action, approved of it by starting at once for the door."

The King turned away his head to hide a smile; then, after a few seconds, he fixed his eyes again on that intelligent face, a face so resolute and daring that it might be compared to the eagle's haughty, energetic profile when confronting the sun.

"Well, that is all past," said the prince, after a short silence, during which he made a vain attempt to look his officer down.

But, when the lieutenant perceived the King would say nothing more, he wheeled round and took three steps toward the entrance, murmuring:

"He will not speak, *mordioux!* he will not speak!"

"Thank you, monsieur," the King said at length.

"By my faith," continued the lieutenant, "this is the finishing touch. Blamed for not being as stupid as other people!"

And he reached the door, his spurs jingling in true military fashion.

But on the threshold he felt as if he were being dragged back by some magnetic force; he turned round.

"Your Majesty has told me all?" he asked, in a tone impossible to describe, which, while not apparently urging the monarch to confide in him, was so frank and persuasive that Louis answered immediately:

"Yes, monsieur, but approach."

"Good!" murmured the officer, "he has made up his mind to it at last!"

"Listen to me."

"I will not lose a word, Sire."

"You will mount on horseback about four to-morrow morning, and you will have a horse saddled for me."

"Out of your Majesty's stable?"

"No, one of your musketeers' horses."

"Very well, Sire. Is that all?"

"And you will accompany me."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Shall I inquire for your Majesty, or shall I wait for you?"

"Wait for me."

"Where, Sire?"

"At the little park gate."

The lieutenant bowed, perceiving that the King had said all he intended to say, and, in fact, at this point the King dismissed him, but with a very friendly and gracious gesture.

The officer passed out of the royal chamber, and, with an air of philosophic serenity, took his previous position in his chair; but very far from trying to sleep, as might have been expected, considering the advanced hour of the night, he did more thinking than he had ever done before in his life.

The result of his present reflections was not so gloomy as had been the reflections that preceded them.

"Capital!" said he, "he 's making a beginning; love spurs him on, and he 's making headway, yes, he 's making headway! The King is n't much, but the man may turn out something. Well, we 'll be better able to judge to-morrow morning. Oho!" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright all of a sudden, "that 's a splendid idea, *mordioux!* I should not be surprised if my fortune were to spring from the idea I have just hit on!"

After this outburst the officer rose, and, with his hands in the pockets of his jerkin, strode up and down the vast antechamber which served him as a private room.

The taper flamed up violently, fanned by a cool breeze that blew through the chinks of the door and the apertures of the window, and cut a diagonal passage across the apartment. It threw out a reddish, wavering light, sometimes very vivid, sometimes very dim, and the lieutenant's tall shadow in profile marched along the wall, resembling, with its long sword and plumed hat, a figure by Callot.

"Decidedly," he murmured, "either I am very much mis-

taken or Mazarin is laying a trap for this young lover. Mazarin, to-night, gave her address and suggested a meeting as complacently as M. Dangeau himself might have done. I heard him and I know what his words were intended to mean: 'They will be on the opposite side of the bridge of Blois to-morrow.' *Mordioux!* the significance of that was pretty clear; a lover could not mistake it, anyway! This, then, has been the cause of his embarrassment, his hesitation, and of the present order: 'M. le Lieutenant, mount your horse at four to-morrow morning.' Now, the purport of his words is as clear as if he had said to me: 'M. le Lieutenant, at four in the morning, and at the bridge of Blois, you comprehend?' Why, this is a state secret! a state secret of which I, however unimportant I may be, am in possession. And why am I in possession of it? Because I have good eyes, as I just now told his Majesty. It is said that he is madly in love with this little Italian doll. It is said that he flung himself on his knees before his mother and asked her consent to marry her! It is said that the queen has even consulted the court of Rome as to whether such a marriage, contracted against her will, would be valid! Ah! if I were now only twenty-five! if I had at my side those, alas, I have no longer! if I did not feel such profound contempt for everybody, I could embroil Mazarin with the queen mother, France with Spain, and make a queen to suit my taste; but — pshaw!"

And the lieutenant snapped his fingers in high disdain.

"This wretched Italian, this miserable knave, this petty niggard, who has just refused a million to the King of England, would not give me, perhaps, a thousand pistoles for the information I could bring him. Oh, *mordioux!* I must be doting! I must be getting awfully dull! The idea of Mazarin giving anything! Ha! ha! ha!"

And the officer laughed fiercely.

"I had better go to sleep," said he, "and that at once. My mind is tired out with my night's work; it will be clearer to-morrow than it is now."

And thereupon he wrapped himself up in his cloak and dismissed his royal neighbor from his thoughts.

Five minutes later he was asleep, his lips apart and his hands clinched; and, instead of his secret, there escaped from him a resounding snore, which rose and swelled under the majestic roof of the antechamber.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARIE DE MANCINI.

The sun had scarcely touched with its first rays the majestic trees in the park and the lofty vanes of the castle, when the young King, already awake for two hours, because love had banished sleep, opened the shutters with his own hand and looked eagerly into the court of the sleeping palace.

He saw it was the hour of which he had spoken to the lieutenant; the great clock in the court pointed to a quarter past four.

He did not call for his valet de chambre, who was sleeping soundly at some distance; he dressed without any assistance, and when the valet entered, looking quite scared, because he thought he had neglected his duties, Louis dismissed him, at the same time enjoining the most absolute silence.

Then he descended the little staircase, passed out through a side door, and saw a man on horseback at the park wall, leading another horse by the bridle.

This horseman was so muffled up in his cloak and wore his hat so slouched that he was not recognizable.

From the way in which it was saddled, the horse might have belonged to a wealthy tradesman, and the most experienced eye could distinguish nothing remarkable in its appearance.

Louis advanced and laid hold of this horse's bridle; the officer, without alighting himself, held the stirrup, and in an unconcerned tone of voice begged to know his Majesty's orders.

"Follow me," answered Louis XIV.

The officer trotted behind his master, and both rode to the bridge. When they were on the other side of the Loire:

"Monsieur," said the King, "be good enough to push forward until you see a carriage; you will then return and let me know you have seen it; I will remain here."

"Will your Majesty be graciously pleased to give me some particulars relating to the carriage I am to discover?"

"There will be two ladies in it and doubtless their two maids also."

"Sire, I should not like to commit an error; would you deign to mention some other sign by which I can make sure it is the right carriage?"

"In all probability you will notice on it the arms of M. le Cardinal."

"That is all I require, Sire," replied the officer, now quite certain he could make no mistake.

He set his horse to a gallop and spurred in the direction pointed out by the King. But, before he had gone five hundred yards, he perceived four mules, and then a carriage was visible, coming up from behind a little hill.

It was followed by another carriage.

It needed but a glance to assure him that these were the equipages he was on the lookout for.

He turned rein at once and galloped back to the King.

"Sire," said he, "yonder are the carriages. In the first, as you expected, are two ladies and their attendants; the second contains footmen, provisions, and wearing apparel."

"Very well. Go and tell these ladies," answered the King, in tones of strong emotion, "that a cavalier belonging to the court would pay his respects to them."

The officer set off at a gallop.

"*Mordioux!*" said he, as he dashed along, "this for me is a novel employment, and — honorable, I hope! I was complaining of being a mere nobody, and lo! I am the King's confidant. And I only a musketeer! — I ought to be as proud as a peacock!"

He approached the carriage and fulfilled his mission with proper spirit and gallantry.

There were, in fact, two ladies in the carriage; one of them was remarkably beautiful, but somewhat thin; the other, though not so well endowed by nature, was vivacious and graceful; the subtle lines in her forehead proved also that she was the possessor of a resolute will. Her eyes were wonderfully keen and penetrating, and there was more eloquence in them than in all the amorous phrases so fashionable in this age of gallantry.

D'Artagnan felt he was making no mistake in delivering his message to her, although, as we have said, the second lady was perhaps prettier.

"Ladies," said he, "I am the lieutenant of the King's musketeers, and I have to inform you that there is a cavalier near by who has been waiting for your arrival and is desirous of paying his respects to you."

At these words, the effect of which he noted with consider-

able curiosity, the lady with the black eyes uttered a joyous exclamation, stretched her head out of the window, and, as soon as she saw the cavalier, held out her arms, cryng:

"Ah, my dear Sire!"

And tears streamed from her eyes.

The coachman brought his horses to a standstill, the two maids at the back of the carriage rose in confusion, and the second lady made a slight courtesy, accompanied by the most ironical smile that jealousy ever imparted to a woman's lips.

"Marie! Dear Marie!" cried the King, taking the black-eyed lady's hand in both his own.

Then thrusting aside the heavy portière, he drew her out of the carriage with such ardor that she was in his arms before touching the earth.

The lieutenant, stationed on the other side of the carriage, saw and heard, without attracting any attention.

The King offered his arm to Mademoiselle de Mancini, making a sign to the coachman and lackeys to continue their course.

It was close on six o'clock; the air was bracing and the road charming; lofty trees, their foliage still imprisoned in its yellow sheaths, shook the diamond-tinted dew-drops from their quivering branches; the grass was shooting up at the foot of the hedges; the swallows, only a few days returned, described their graceful curves between the sky and the waters; a perfumed breeze from the blossoming woods hurried along the path and wrinkled the bosom of the river. All these beauties of the day, the odors of the plants, the aspirations of earth toward heaven, intoxicated the two lovers, who walked on, side by side and arm in arm, their eyes looking into each other's eyes, their hands clasping each other's hands, and not daring to speak, because they had so much to say.

The officer perceived that the horse, which had been left to its own devices, disturbed Mademoiselle de Mancini by running backward and forward. This afforded the officer an excuse for drawing near them: he dismounted, took charge of the animal, and walking along between the two horses which he was now leading, he did not lose a single word or gesture of the lovers.

Mademoiselle de Mancini was the first to break silence.

"Ah! my dear Sire, you have not forsaken me, then?"

"No," replied the King; "you can see that yourself, Marie."

"But I have heard so often that, once we were apart, you would no longer think of me!"

"My darling, is it only to-day you have discovered we are surrounded by people whose interest it is to deceive us?"

"But then, Sire, this journey, this alliance with Spain? They will marry you!"

Louis hung his head.

And at the same time the officer had a glimpse of the eyes of Marie de Mancini as they gleamed in the sunlight; they had the sheen of a poniard that has just leaped from its sheath.

"And you have done nothing to remove the obstacles in the way of our love?" the young girl inquired, after a few moments' silence.

"Oh, mademoiselle, how can you believe that! I have knelt to my mother; I have prayed, implored; I told her that all my hopes of happiness centred in you; nay, I threatened —"

"And what followed?" asked Marie, eagerly.

"The queen mother wrote to the court of Rome, and the answer was that a marriage between us would be invalid and would be annulled by the Holy Father. At last, seeing there was no hope for us, I demanded that my marriage with the Infanta should be, at least, delayed."

"Which has not hindered you from going to meet her."

"But how could I help it? To all my entreaties, to all my tears, I received but one reply — the interest of the state."

"Well?"

"Well! what can I do, mademoiselle, when so many people are united in opposing their will to mine?"

It was now the turn of Marie to hang her head.

"Then we must bid farewell, and forever," said she. "You know I am to be banished, buried alive; you know that I must suffer even more than that: you know it has been decided that I shall marry!"

Louis turned pale and pressed his hand against his heart.

"Had my own life only been at stake, I should have yielded to the persecution of which I have been the victim, but I thought that yours, too, my dear Sire, was involved, and that, as I belonged to you, I must struggle to defend your property."

"Yes, oh, yes! my property, my treasure!" murmured the King, though perhaps with more gallantry than passion.

"The cardinal would have yielded," Marie went on, "if you had appealed to him in the first instance, and had insisted

on his consent. To call the King of France his nephew! — Surely you understand, Sire? Why, to achieve such a result, the cardinal would have done anything, made war even. The cardinal would be then doubly sure of governing without interference — had he not reared the King and given him his niece? — and would have borne down all opposition, swept away every obstacle from our path. Oh, Sire, I am certain of it. I am only a woman, but the eyes of love see clearly."

The impression produced on the King by her words was rather singular. Apparently, instead of inflaming his passion, they cooled it. He slackened his pace and said hurriedly:

"But what can we do, mademoiselle? Everything has failed."

"Except your will; is not that so, my dear Sire?"

"Alas!" said the King, with a heightened color, "am I allowed to have a will?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Mancini, in a tone of despair, for these words wrung her heart.

"A king's will has to bend before the policy and interests of his state."

"Ah! you never loved me, Sire!" cried Marie; "if you had, you would have a will of your own."

While uttering these words, she fixed her eyes on her lover; she saw that he looked paler and more heartbroken than the exile who is leaving forever the land of his birth.

"Upbraid me," he said, "but say not that I do not love you."

And long silence followed these words, which the young King pronounced with real and deep emotion.

"I cannot bring myself to think, Sire," continued Marie, making a final appeal to her lover, "that after to-morrow I shall never see you more; I cannot bring myself to think that then I must, until death relieve me, pass my sad days far from Paris, and that an old man's lips will touch the hand now clasped in yours; in very truth, my dear Sire, the thought of all this drives me to despair."

And Marie de Mancini burst into a flood of tears.

The King, too, was profoundly affected; he pressed his handkerchief to his lips to stifle a sob.

"Look," she said, "the carriages have stopped and my sister is waiting for me; the momentous hour has come; whatever you decide on now will be decided for life. Oh, Sire! are you willing that I should lose you? Is it your wish that

the woman to whom you said 'I love you' should belong to any one except her king, her lord, her lover? Oh, Louis, courage! Say but the words: 'It is my will!' and all my life is linked with yours and all my heart is yours forever."

The King did not answer.

Then Marie looked at him as Dido looked at Æneas in the Elysian Fields, fiercely and scornfully.

"Farewell, then," said she; "farewell to life, farewell to love, farewell to Heaven!"

She turned away; but the King detained her, seized her hand, which he passionately kissed, and, his despair getting the better of the resolution he had apparently formed, he let fall on that beautiful hand a burning tear of regret; Marie started back, as if, in very truth, that tear had burned her.

She saw his tearful eyes, his pallid brow, his convulsed lips; she cried in tones it would be vain to attempt to describe:

"Oh, Sire! you are a king, you weep, and yet you let me go!"

But the only answer of the King was to hide his face in his handkerchief.

At this point the officer gave a sort of whoop that frightened the two horses.

Mademoiselle de Mancini angrily quitted the King and hurriedly entered her carriage, crying to the coachman:

"Away, away quickly!"

The coachman obeyed, lashed his mules, and the heavy vehicle moved forward on its creaking axle, while the King of France, utterly dejected and woebegone, did not dare to look before or behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH BOTH THE KING AND THE LIEUTENANT SHOW THEY HAVE GOOD MEMORIES.

When the King, like lovers the world over, had watched, long and intently, the carriage that was bearing away his mistress until it vanished beneath the horizon; when he had turned again and again in the same direction, and had finally succeeded in calming somewhat the emotions of his heart and soul, he began to remember that he was not alone.

The officer still held the King's horse by the bridle; he hoped, in spite of everything, that the prince would take a decisive step.

"There is nothing to hinder him from mounting and galloping after the carriage," he said to himself; "they won't lose anything by waiting."

But the lieutenant had too dazzling and rich an imagination; it left that of the King far behind; Louis was not at all inclined to indulge in any such luxury of sentiment.

All he did was to approach the officer and say to him, disconsolately:

"Come, get on horseback; there is nothing more to be done here."

The officer imitated the leisurely, despondent deportment of the King, and bestrode his steed in a very leisurely and despondent manner. The King clapped on spurs, and the lieutenant followed suit.

At the bridge Louis turned his head for the last time. The officer, as patient as a god who has eternity before and behind him, again had hopes that his sovereign would show a little energy. But his hopes were in vain. Louis simply rode on, entered the street leading to the castle, and returned to his apartments just as the clock was striking seven.

As soon as the King was inside, the musketeer noticed — he noticed everything — that a corner of the hangings on the cardinal's bedroom window was lifted; he sighed heavily, like some one just freed from very tight bonds, and said in an undertone:

"Upon my word, I am rather glad, my worthy officer, that there is nothing more to be done here!"

The King summoned his gentleman.

"I shall receive no one before two o'clock," said he; "you understand, monsieur?"

"Sire," replied the gentleman, "there is some one outside, however, who requests to be allowed to enter."

"Who is it?"

"Your lieutenant of musketeers."

"The officer who attended me?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Ah!" returned the King. "Yes, show him in."

The officer entered.

At a sign from the King, the gentleman and the valet de

chambre passed out. Louis followed them with his eyes until they had shut the door; when the hangings had fallen behind them, he said:

"Your presence reminds me, monsieur, that I had forgotten to recommend to you the most absolute discretion."

"Oh, Sire! why should your Majesty take the trouble to do so? Evidently you do not know me, Sire."

"Oh, yes, I do, monsieur; I know you are discreet, still, as I had not given you any directions —"

The officer bowed.

"Your Majesty has nothing further to say to me?" he asked.

"No, monsieur, and you may now retire."

"Will your Majesty be graciously pleased to give me leave not to retire until I have spoken to the King, Sire?"

"What do you wish to say? Explain yourself, monsieur."

"Sire, something which is not of the slightest interest to you but of the greatest importance to myself. Forgive me for troubling you with it. But that I am urged by the strongest necessity, I would never have done so, and would have disappeared, dumb and unnoticed, as I have ever been."

"Disappeared! I do not understand you, monsieur."

"Sire," said the officer, "I have, in short, come to ask your Majesty to give me my discharge."

The King started back in astonishment, but the officer remained as impassive as a statue.

"Your discharge, monsieur, and for how long, pray?"

"Forever, Sire."

"What! you wish to quit my service, monsieur?" said Louis, in a tone that expressed something more than astonishment.

"Sire, I regret to say I do."

"Impossible!"

"Excuse me, Sire, but I am getting old; I have worn harness now for thirty-four or thirty-five years; my poor shoulders feel tired; I think it is time for me to give way to younger men. I am not a man of the present age — I have still one foot in the old one; as a result, everything seems so strange to my eyes that I am bewildered and dazed. In a word, I have the honor to ask your Majesty for my discharge."

"Monsieur," said the King, eyeing the officer, who wore his uniform with an ease that a much younger man might have envied, "you are stronger and more robust than I am."

"Oh!" replied the officer, with a modest smile, although the modesty was anything but genuine, "your Majesty says so because I have fairly good eyes, and am rather firm on my legs, not a bad horseman, and own a mustache which is still black. Sire, all this is vanity, vanity of vanities, delusion, outward show, smoke! I know I look young, Sire, but I am really very old, and I am quite sure that, before another half year, I shall be a wreck, gouty, impotent. And so, Sire —"

"Monsieur," interrupted the King, "do you remember what you said yesterday? You told me, from the very spot where you are standing, that you enjoyed better health than any man in France; that you did not know what fatigue meant; and that it did not trouble you in the least to remain at your post night and day. Did you say so or not? Try and remember, monsieur."

The officer sighed deeply.

"Sire," said he, "old age is boastful, and an old man may be pardoned for speaking well of himself, since no one else is likely to do so. It is possible I uttered the words to which your Majesty alludes; but the fact is, I am very weary, and ask to be superannuated."

"Monsieur," said the King, advancing toward the officer with a gesture full of grace and majesty, "you have not assigned the true reason; you may wish to quit my service, but you are hiding from me the motive for your withdrawal."

"Sire, believe me that —"

"I believe what I see, monsieur: I see an energetic, vigorous man, a man of extraordinary presence of mind, and the best soldier in France, perhaps, and this man will never persuade me the least bit in the world that he is in need of repose."

"Ah, Sire!" answered the lieutenant, bitterly, "your Majesty is too lavish of your eulogies; in good truth, I am confounded by them! Able, energetic, vigorous, brave, the best soldier in France! Why, Sire, your Majesty has so exaggerated the few meritorious qualities I possess that, really, I no longer recognize myself. Were I vain enough to believe even half of what your Majesty says about me, I should regard myself as a valuable, nay, an indispensable man; I should say that a servant in whom so many brilliant qualities were concentrated must be a priceless treasure. Now, Sire, I have been all my life, if you will allow me to say so, very much underrated, at

least according to my own idea, except on the present occasion. I repeat, therefore, that your Majesty exaggerates."

The King frowned, for he saw that the officer's words veiled a poignant and bitter satire under their smiling mockery.

"Come, now, monsieur," said he, "let us deal with the question frankly. Do you dislike my service? No subterfuges, if you please. Answer boldly and honestly; I wish you to do so."

At these words the officer, who had been for some moments twisting his hat in his hands, with a rather embarrassed air, raised his head.

"Oh, Sire," he answered, "that sets me a little more at my ease. To a question so frankly put I will reply with equal frankness. An open avowal of the truth is salutary, both on account of the pleasure that is experienced when the heart is relieved of a burden and on account of the rarity of such avowals. I will, therefore, confess the truth to my King, at the same time beseeching him to excuse the bluntness of an old soldier."

The acute anxiety felt by Louis as he gazed on his officer was apparent from his agitated gestures.

"Well, speak on; I am impatient to hear the truths you have to tell me."

The lieutenant flung his hat on a table, and his martial and intelligent face suddenly took on an unusual grandeur and solemnity.

"Sire," said he, "I leave the King's service because I am dissatisfied. Even an ordinary workman can, at the present day, respectfully approach his master, as I am doing, can render him an account of his labor and of the funds entrusted to his care, and can then say: 'Master, my day's work is finished, please pay me, and let us part.'"

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" cried the King, purple with rage.

"Ah, Sire!" returned the officer, bending a knee, "never was servant more respectful to a King than I am to your Majesty; but you ordered me to speak the truth. And now that I have begun to do so, it must out, even though you bade me be silent."

There was so much determination in the corrugated muscles of the officer's face that Louis XIV. did not think it necessary to tell him to go on; he continued, therefore, while the King regarded him with mingled curiosity and admiration.

"Sire, as I have already told you, I have served the house of France for nearly thirty-five years; there are few that have worn out so many swords in its service as I have done, and the swords of which I speak were good swords, Sire. I was but a boy, unschooled in everything except courage, when the King, your father, saw a man in me. I was a man when Cardinal de Richelieu saw an enemy in me. Sire, you can read the story of that enmity between the ant and the lion, even to the very last line, in the secret archives of your family. Should you feel inclined to examine it, do so, Sire; for that story is well worth the trouble of examining it, I can assure you, Sire. There you will read that the weary and exhausted lion cried for mercy, and it is but justice to him to state that the mercy he craved he granted also. Oh! those were glorious times, Sire, as interspersed with battles as an epic of Tasso or Ariosto. The marvels of those times, marvels which our age would reject as incredible, were for us commonplace incidents. For five years I was a hero, a hero every day of those five years, at least in the opinion of certain illustrious personages, and believe me, Sire, to be a hero during five years is to be a hero for a very long period! Still I am inclined to credit what those persons told me, for they were fair judges of what constitutes a hero; they were named M. de Richelieu, the Duke of Buckingham, M. de Beaufort, and M. de Retz, himself a doughty genius in street warfare! Finally, Louis XIII., and even the queen, your august mother, deigned to say to me on a certain occasion, 'I thank you!' I have forgotten the service I had the happiness to render them. Pardon me, Sire, for speaking so boldly; but, as I have already had the honor of telling your Majesty, what I am now relating is history."

The King bit his lips and flung himself violently into his chair.

"I am afraid I annoy your Majesty," said the lieutenant. "Ah! Sire, truth is ever a troublesome companion, bristling all over with steel; she wounds him who comes near her, and sometimes him who tells what she is."

"No, monsieur," answered the King; "I requested you to speak, so continue."

"After serving the King and the cardinal I served the regency, Sire; I fought also during the Fronde, but not so much as previously. Men were already beginning to diminish in stature. Still, I commanded your Majesty's musketeers on

some perilous occasions which are recorded on the company's orders of the day. What a splendid lot was mine at that period! I was the favorite of M. de Mazarin. It was 'Lieutenant here, lieutenant there! Lieutenant to the right, lieutenant to the left!' There was not a single thump given in France with the giving of which your very humble servant was not concerned. But soon France was not big enough for our worthy cardinal! He sent me to England to deal with Cromwell, a gentleman with very little softness about him, I assure you, Sire. I had the honor of his acquaintance and I have been able to take his measure. The inducements held out to me, if I undertook that commission, were very liberal, and as I did exactly the reverse of what I was ostensibly recommended to do, I was generously rewarded. I was appointed to the post of captain of musketeers, the most enviable post at court, for it gives the holder of it precedence over the marshals of France; and this is but justice, for when you name the captain of musketeers you name the flower of the army, the bravest of the brave!"

"Captain, monsieur!" exclaimed the King, "you have made a mistake, you mean lieutenant."

"No, Sire, I never make a mistake; your Majesty may take my word for that; M. de Mazarin himself gave me the commission."

"And what followed?"

"M. de Mazarin, as you know better than any one, does not often give and even sometimes takes back what he has given: he took it back from me when peace was made and he no longer needed me. Doubtless I was not worthy of a post that had been filled previously by M. de Tréville, of illustrious memory; but then, it had been promised to me, had been given to me; the promise and the gift should have held good."

"So that is the cause of your discontent, monsieur?" replied the King. "Well, I will see to the matter. I love justice, and your claim, though made in a somewhat military fashion, does not displease me."

"Oh, Sire," returned the officer, "your Majesty must have misunderstood me; I make no claim any longer."

"Excessive delicacy on your part, monsieur; but I will attend to your interests, and later on —"

"Oh, Sire! that phrase 'later on'! For thirty years have I

lived on that amiable phrase which I have heard from the lips of so many great personages, and now, Sire, from yours. 'Later on!' Because of that phrase I have received twenty wounds and have reached my fifty-fourth year with never a louis in my purse, without ever meeting with a protector during my career, — I who have protected so many. And so, Sire, I have changed the formula, and when any one says to me: 'Later on!' I answer: 'At once!' However, Sire, all I crave is rest. I may surely obtain that, since the granting of it will cost nobody anything."

"I did not expect such language, monsieur, from one who has always lived among persons of such exalted rank. You forget you are speaking to the King, to a gentleman who is, I presume, of quite as good a house as your own, and when I say 'later on,' I mean it."

"No doubt, Sire. But the conclusion you must draw from the startling truths I have just told you is simply this: though I saw on that table the marshal's truncheon, the constable's sword, the crown of Poland, I swear to you, Sire, that, instead of 'Later on,' I should still say: 'At once!' Pray, pardon me, Sire, I belong to the country of your grandfather Henri IV. I do not speak often, but, when I do speak, I speak right out."

"It would seem the future of my reign has but little temptation for you, monsieur!" said Louis, haughtily.

"Forgetfulness, forgetfulness on every side!" cried the officer, undauntedly. "The master has forgotten the servant, and now the servant is forced to forget the master. I live in a wretched age, Sire. I see that the young are depressed and timid, faint-hearted and impoverished, when they should be rich and powerful. Yesterday evening, for example, I throw open the door of a King of France before a King of England, whose father, in spite of my insignificance, I would have saved from death, had not God been against me, that God who inspired Cromwell, his elect; I throw open that door, I repeat, throw open a brother's palace to a brother, and I see — bear with me, Sire, the thought of it wrings my heart! — I see the minister of my King drive away the exile and degrade my master by condemning to misery a sovereign who is my master's equal; and finally, I see my prince, who is young, handsome, and brave, with courage in his heart and lightning in his eye — I see him tremble before a priest who laughs at him behind the curtains of his closet, where, in his bed, he

digests all the gold of France, to be afterward ingulfed in his secret coffers. Yes, I understand that look, Sire. My audacity borders on insanity. I cannot help it, Sire. But, though I am an old man, if any one dared to utter in my presence the words I have now ventured to address to my King, I would ram them down his throat! In short, Sire, it was your Majesty who insisted that I should empty my heart before you. Well, I have poured out at your feet all the rage that has been accumulating in it for thirty years, just as I would pour out all my blood at your Majesty's behest."

The King, without uttering a word, dashed off the cold perspiration that coursed in streams down from his temples.

The minute's silence that followed this violent outburst represented ages of suffering for speaker and listener.

"Monsieur," said the King, at length, "you have pronounced the word 'forgetfulness;' it is the only word to which I have attended, it is the only word to which I will reply. Others may have been forgetful, but I am not, and, in proof of this, I will state that I remember how on a day of rebellious convulsion, how on a day when a frantic mob, raging and howling like the sea, invaded the Palais Royal; how on a certain day, in short, when I feigned to be asleep in my bed, a single man, with drawn sword, stood concealed behind my pillow, guarding my life, ready to risk his own for me, as he had already risked it a score of times for my family. Was not that gentleman whose name I asked at the time called M. d'Artagnan, monsieur?"

"Your Majesty has a good memory," the officer answered coldly.

"Surely, then, monsieur," continued the King, "if I can remember so well what occurred when I was a child, I am likely to remember still better what may occur when I am a man."

"Your Majesty has been richly endowed by God," said the officer, in the same tone.

"Come, now, M. d'Artagnan," went on Louis, feverishly, "can you not be as patient as I am? Can you not do as I do?"

"And what do you do, Sire?"

"I wait."

"Your Majesty waits, because you are young; but, Sire, I have no time to wait: old age is at my door, and death is fol-

lowing old age, and looking into the inmost recesses of my house. Your Majesty is beginning life; you are full of hope and sanguine of an auspicious future. But, Sire, I stand at the opposite verge of the horizon, and we are so far apart that I should never have time to wait until your Majesty came up with me."

Louis took another turn in the chamber, still wiping from his forehead the perspiration, which flowed in such abundance that his physicians would have been alarmed, had they seen him in such a condition.

"Very well, monsieur," Louis said at last, curtly. "You want your discharge; you shall have it. You resign your rank as lieutenant of musketeers?"

"I humbly lay my resignation at your Majesty's feet, Sire."

"Enough. I will sign the order for the payment of your pension."

"I shall be under a thousand obligations to your Majesty for doing so."

"Monsieur," said the King, making a violent effort to speak calmly, "I believe you are losing a good master."

"And I am sure of it, Sire."

"Shall you ever find such another?"

"Oh, Sire, I am well aware that your Majesty has not your equal in the world. Consequently, I have decided never to enter the service of any other king whatever, and will henceforth be my own master."

"You say so?"

"I swear so, Sire."

"I shall remember your words, monsieur."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"You know I have a good memory," continued the King.

"Yes, Sire; and yet I should wish your Majesty's memory were somewhat in default on the present occasion, so that you might forget all the miseries which I have been compelled to lay bare before your eyes. But your Majesty is so far above the poor and humble that I hope —"

"My Majesty, monsieur, will be like the sun, which beholds everything, the great and the little, the prosperous and the wretched, giving to some brightness, to others warmth, and to all life. Adieu, M. d'Artagnan, adieu; you are free."

And the King, with a hoarse sob, which was quickly repressed, went rapidly into the next apartment.

D'Artagnan took up his hat from the table upon which he had flung it, and passed out.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PROSCRIBED.

Before D'Artagnan reached the foot of the stairs the King summoned his gentleman.

"I have a commission for you, monsieur," said he.

"I am at your Majesty's orders."

"Wait a moment, then."

The young King thereupon wrote the following letter, which cost him many a sigh, although something like triumph gleamed in his eyes.

"*Monsieur le Cardinal:*

"*Thanks to your excellent advice and to your firmness, especially, I have vanquished and crushed a weakness unworthy of a king. The ability with which you have arranged my destiny has been of too signal a character not to make me pause at the very moment I was about to undo your work. I saw how wrong it was for me to attempt to wander from the path you had marked out for me. Assuredly, nothing could have been more unfortunate for France or for my family than a misunderstanding between myself and my minister.*

"*Yet this misfortune would have occurred had I married your niece. I see that plainly now, and will henceforth offer no opposition to the fulfilment of my fate. I am, therefore, ready to espouse the Infanta Maria Teresa. You may at once make arrangements for opening the conference.*

"*Yours affectionately,*

"*Louis.*"

The King read the letter and then sealed it with his own hand.

"Take this letter to M. le Cardinal," said he.

His gentleman withdrew. At Mazarin's door he met Bernouin, who was waiting for him anxiously.

"Well?" asked the minister's valet de chambre.

"Monsieur," said the gentleman, "I have a letter for his Eminence."

"A letter! Ah! we expected as much after the little expedition this morning."

"So you knew that his Majesty — "

"As prime minister we are bound to know everything, and his Majesty, I have no doubt, begged and prayed and implored?"

"I don't know that, but I know he sighed often enough while he was writing."

"Of course, of course, we all know what that sort of thing means. Happiness is the cause of as many sighs as grief, monsieur."

"Still the King did not seem at all happy on his return, monsieur."

"You must not have examined him closely. Besides, you only saw his Majesty on his return, as the lieutenant of the guards was his sole companion. But I had his Eminence's telescope; whenever he was too tired to look through it, I took his place. I am sure I saw them both in tears."

"Ah, but are you sure they were weeping from happiness?"

"No, but from love; and I am certain they were lavish in their promises of mutual devotion, promises which the King asks no better than to keep. This letter is the beginning of their fulfilment."

"And how does his Eminence regard this love of theirs, which, for that matter, is no secret?"

Bernouin took the arm of the King's messenger as they were mounting the staircase.

"I may tell you in confidence," said he, in an undertone, "that his Eminence expects the affair will be arranged successfully. I know very well we shall have war with Spain. But that doesn't matter; nothing could please the nobility better. The dowry M. le Cardinal will bestow on his niece will be royal, nay, more than royal. We shall have plenty of money and no end of festivals and merrymaking. Everybody will be satisfied."

"It may be so," answered the gentleman, with a shake of his head; "but I imagine this is a very small letter to contain all you say."

"But I am certain of what I say. M. d'Artagnan has told me everything."

"That is different. Pray what did he tell you?"

"I made some inquiries about certain matters on the part of the cardinal, taking good care to conceal my real object, for M. d'Artagnan is as sly as a fox.

"'My dear M. Bernouin,' he answered, 'the King is madly in love with Mademoiselle de Mancini. That is all I am at liberty to tell you.'

"'What!' I exclaimed, 'do you really believe him capable of opposing the plans of his Eminence?'

"'Ah, don't ask me,' he said, 'I believe the King is capable of everything. He has a head of iron, and what he wills, he wills firmly. If he has set his heart on marrying Mademoiselle de Mancini, he 'll marry her for a certainty.'

"Then he went to the stables, took a horse, saddled it himself, jumped on its back, and was off like a shot."

"And so you believe that —"

"M. le Lieutenant knows more than he wants to tell."

"And, in your opinion, M. d'Artagnan has —"

"Galloped after the exiles, in all probability, to make arrangements for the final triumph of the King's love."

Gossiping in this fashion, the two friends arrived at the door of his Eminence's study. His Eminence was free from gout, and was walking restlessly up and down the room, listening at the doors and peeping through the windows.

Bernouin entered, followed by the gentleman, who had been ordered by the King to hand the letter to the Cardinal personally. Mazarin took the letter; but before he opened it he assumed the smile that was always gotten up by him for public occasions; a useful smile, for it always served to conceal his real sentiments, no matter of what character they might be. And so, whatever might be the impression made upon him by the letter, no one could discern it on his face.

"Good!" he exclaimed, when he had perused it a couple of times. "Nothing could be better, monsieur! Inform the King that I thank him for his compliance with the wishes of the queen mother, and that I am going to set about the accomplishment of his wishes immediately."

The gentleman retired. No sooner had the door closed behind him than the cardinal, who wore no mask for Bernouin, flung aside the one that had covered his face for the moment, and, in his most lugubrious tone:

"Summon M. de Brienne," said he.

In five minutes the secretary was in the room.

"Monsieur," said he, "I have just rendered a great service to the monarchy, the greatest I ever rendered it during my life. Bear this letter to her Majesty the queen mother, and, when she returns it, you will place it in Box B, which is full of documents and records relating to my ministry."

Brienne passed out, and, as the seal of this interesting letter was broken, he did not fail to read it on his way. It is hardly necessary to state that Bernouin, who was everybody's friend, came up close enough to the secretary to read it over his shoulder. The news spread through the castle with such rapidity that Mazarin began to fear it would reach the queen mother before Louis XIV.'s letter. A moment later every one was ordered to be ready to move, and M. de Condé, after paying his respects to the King at what would have been his *lever*, if he had not been up several hours before, wrote down the city of Portiers on his tablet, as the place where their Majesties should next sojourn and repose.

And so, in a few minutes, an intrigue was foiled that had kept all the diplomatists of Europe secretly on the alert for some time. Yet it is not very clear that it had any other result except to deprive a poor lieutenant of musketeers of his commission and chances of advancement. It is true, however, that, on the other hand, he gained his liberty.

We shall soon learn whether M. d'Artagnan turned this liberty to account. At present we will, with the reader's permission, return to the Hôtellerie des Médicis, a window in which had just been opened, at the very moment that orders were issued at the castle for the King's departure.

This window was in one of the apartments of King Charles. The luckless prince had passed the night in a sort of delirium, his head resting on his hands and his elbows on a table, while the aged and feeble Parry had fallen asleep in a corner, worn out in body and mind. Strange was the destiny of this loyal servitor, who saw the same frightful series of misfortunes that had afflicted the first generation now threatening the second. When Charles II. had fully realized the fresh defeat he had just experienced, when he had fathomed the hopeless isolation into which he had just fallen, and seen his last hope melt into thin air, he was seized with a sort of dizziness and fell back in the wide armchair upon which he sat.

Then God took compassion on the unfortunate prince and

sent to him sleep, the innocent brother of death. He did not awaken until half-past six, at a moment when the sun was already shining brightly on his chamber, and Parry, who did not stir for fear of disturbing him, was gazing with deepest sorrow on his young master's eyes, red from want of sleep, and on his cheeks, pallid from suffering and privations.

At length the noise made by some heavy wagons, descending toward the Loire, aroused Charles. He got up, looked around him, like one who had forgotten where he was, perceived Parry, shook his hand, and ordered him to settle his account with Maître Cropole. Maître Cropole, now that he had to make out his bill, acquitted himself of the task, it must be admitted, like an honest man; he repeated, however, his usual complaint, namely, that the two travellers had eaten nothing. This was doubly annoying, for it at once discredited his cooking and forced him to ask payment for meals that had not been consumed, but, nevertheless, were of no further use to him. Parry made no objection, but paid.

"I hope," said the King, "that has not been the case with the horses. They have certainly not eaten at your expense, and it will be rather disagreeable for travellers like us, who have to go a long distance, if we find that their strength has deteriorated."

But at these words, Cropole assumed his most imposing demeanor, and replied that the manger of the Médici was quite as hospitable as the dining-room.

The King then mounted; his old servant did likewise, and both started for Paris, scarcely meeting on their way a single individual, either in the streets or suburbs.

This journey was one of the most painful incidents in the prince's life, for it was a second banishment. The unhappy cling to the frailest hopes, just as the happy cling to the most unalloyed of their enjoyments, and when they are forced to abandon the spot where hope buoyed up their hearts, they experience that agonizing regret which the exile feels when he sets foot on the ship that is to bear him to a foreign land. It would seem as if the heart that has been often wounded ever after suffers from the slightest bruise; as if it looked on a passing relief from misery, which is but the absence of pain, as a real good. And the reason of this is that God, into the midst of the most appalling misfortunes, has flung hope as the drop of water the wealthy sinner in hell asked of Lazarus.

For a moment even, the hope of Charles II. had been more than an elusive joy. It was the moment when he was welcomed with such cordiality by his brother king. At that moment his hope had become tangible, had become a reality; and then a sudden change, and the refusal of Mazarin had turned that air-built reality back again into a dream. That promise which Louis XIV. had given and so quickly withdrawn was but a mockery. A mockery, like his crown, his sceptre, his friends, like everything that had surrounded his royal childhood and forsaken his proscribed youth. Mockery! everything was a mockery for Charles II., except the cold and sombre repose which is promised by death.

Such were the ideas of the hapless prince, seated languidly on his horse, upon the neck of which he had dropped the reins; he rode along beneath the mild and genial sun that shines in the month of May, and, in his gloomy misanthropy, the exile saw in the brightness of the heavens an insult to his hopeless sorrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

REMEMBER!

A HORSEMAN riding at full speed along the road leading to Blois, which he had left about half an hour before, passed the two travellers, and while doing so, courteously raised his hat, though he was evidently in a great hurry. The King scarcely paid any attention to this cavalier, who was about twenty-four or twenty-five years old. He occasionally turned round and made friendly signs to a man standing in front of a gate belonging to a fine mansion partly red and partly white, or, in other words, built of bricks and granite; it was roofed with slate, and stood on the left of the road along which the prince was travelling.

The person near the gate was a tall, thin old man with white hair; he replied to the signs of the young man by farewell gestures as tender as could have been made by a father.

The young man disappeared at the first turning of the road, a road lined with magnificent trees, and the old man was preparing to return to the house, when his attention was attracted by the two travellers as they came in front of the gate.

The King was riding in the manner to which we have alluded, his head bent, his arms hanging down inertly, allowing his horse to go at whatever pace he chose and almost where he chose, while Parry, who was behind him, had taken off his hat, that he might enjoy to the full the genial influence of the sun, and was looking about to the right and left. His eyes met those of the old man leaning against the gate, who, as if in the presence of something unusual, uttered an exclamation and advanced a step in the direction of the two travellers.

After a glance at Parry, his eyes rested for a moment on his companion. But rapid as was his examination of the King, its effect was visibly reflected on the old man's features, and no sooner had he recognized the younger of the two travellers — we say "recognized," for nothing but a positive recognition could account for his action — no sooner, we repeat, had he recognized the younger of the two travellers than he joined his hands in a gesture of respectful astonishment, took off his hat, and bowed so profoundly that it looked as if he were kneeling.

Though the King was unobservant, or, rather, absorbed in his own reflections, this demonstration at once attracted his attention. He halted, and, turning to Parry, said:

"Good heavens, Parry, who is that man who salutes me so respectfully? Do you think he knows me?"

Parry, who was quite pale from excitement, had already turned his horse in the direction of the gate.

"Ah, Sire," said he, coming suddenly to a stop within five or six yards of the old man, who was now kneeling, "as you can see for yourself, I am lost in amazement, for, if I am not greatly mistaken, I am acquainted with that trusty veteran. Yes, yes, it is he, beyond a doubt. Your Majesty will permit me to speak to him?"

"Of course."

"And so it is you, M. Grimaud?" inquired Parry.

"Yes, it is I," answered the tall old man, straightening himself up, but as respectful in his bearing as before.

"Sire," said Parry, "I surmised correctly; this man is the servant of the Comte de la Fère, the high-minded gentleman about whom I have so often spoken to your Majesty, if you will remember, that his name must not only be in your recollection, but engraved on your heart."

"YONDER," ANSWERED GRIMAUD, POINTING WITH HIS OUTSTRETCHED ARM.

"The man who stood by my father in his last moments?" asked Charles, visibly startled by the remembrance.

"The very same, Sire."

"Alas!" sighed Charles.

Then, addressing Grimaud, whose keen, intelligent eyes were apparently making an effort to fathom his thoughts.

"My friend," he inquired, "does your master, the Comte de la Fère, live in this neighborhood?"

"Yonder," answered Grimaud, pointing with his outstretched arm to the white and red house that stood away from the gate.

"Is M. le Comte de la Fère now at home?"

"At the back, under the chestnuts."

"Parry," said the King, "I must not let this precious opportunity escape me, and I must avail myself of it to thank the gentleman to whom our house is indebted for such a fine example of self-sacrifice and generosity. Be kind enough to hold my horse, my friend."

And throwing the reins to Grimaud, the King passed through the gate into the domain of Athos, entering alone, as one equal might enter the grounds of his fellow. The laconic answer of Grimaud had told him he should find the count at the back, under the chestnuts. He went, therefore, to the left of the house, and made his way to the avenue that had been pointed out to him. The thing was easy enough, for those majestic trees, already covered with foliage and flowers, towered above all the others.

As soon as the young prince entered the avenue, dark in some spots, bright in others, according as the trees that shaded the alley were more or less in leaf, he perceived a gentleman walking with his arms folded behind him and seemingly plunged in thought. No doubt Charles II. must have often had the appearance of this gentleman described to him, for he marched straight up to him without any hesitation. At the sound of his footsteps the Comte de la Fère turned his head, and, seeing a stranger of distinguished and graceful bearing coming toward him, he raised his hat and waited. Charles II. doffed his hat also, when within a few yards of him, as if in response to the count's questioning look.

"M. le Comte," said he, "I have come to discharge a duty. I have long been anxious to offer you the expression of my profound gratitude. I am Charles II., son of Charles

Stuart, who reigned over England and perished on the scaffold."

At the mention of that illustrious name Athos felt a kind of shudder creep through his veins; but at the sight of this young man standing bareheaded before him and offering him his hand, two tears clouded for a moment the limpid azure of his radiant eyes.

He inclined reverently, but the prince took his hand in his.

"Behold how unfortunate I am, M. le Comte!" said Charles. "I have to thank chance alone for this meeting. Alas! instead of having around me the people whom I love and honor, I can only enshrine their services in my heart and their names in my memory, so that had not your servant recognized mine, I should have passed by your house as I would pass by that of a stranger."

"Yes, indeed," said Athos, answering the first part of the King's speech orally and the second with a bow; "yes, indeed, your Majesty has seen many evil days."

"And the worst, alas!" replied Charles, "are, perhaps, still to come."

"Sire, we must have hope!"

"Count, count," continued Charles, shaking his head, "I was hopeful until last night, as hopeful as a good Christian should be, I swear to you."

Athos looked inquiringly at the King.

"Oh, the tale is easily told," said Charles II. "Proscribed, despoiled, and derided, I resolved to conquer my pride and make a last trial of fortune. Has not Heaven decreed that all the good and evil fortune of our family should come eternally from France? You know something about that, monsieur, for you are one of the Frenchmen my unhappy father found at the foot of the scaffold on the day of his death, after having found them close to his side on the day of battle."

"Sire," said Athos, modestly, "I was not alone, and, in any case, my companions and myself have simply done our duty as gentlemen, nothing more. But your Majesty was about to do me the honor of relating to me —"

"That is true. Well, I had the protection — forgive me if I shrink from uttering that word. You will understand, you who understand everything, that it must be difficult for a Stuart to do so — I had, I repeat, the protection of my cousin the Stadtholder of Holland; but, without the intervention, or

at least the consent of France, the Stadtholder would not take the enterprise in hand. I came then to ask the King of France for his consent, and he refused it."

"The King of France refused it, Sire?"

"Oh, not in his own person, — I must do justice to my young brother Louis, — but through M. de Mazarin."

Athos bit his lips.

"Perhaps you consider I should have expected this refusal?" said the King, who had noticed the expression on the count's features.

"You have guessed correctly, Sire," answered Athos, respectfully; "I have known that Italian long."

"Then I determined to carry the matter through to the end and learn the fate in store for me. I told my brother Louis that, to avoid compromising France or Holland, I would try my fortune myself, as I had done before, with two hundred gentlemen, if he gave them to me, and a million if he lent it to me."

"Well, Sire?"

"Well, monsieur, I am under the influence of a strange feeling at the present moment; it is a sort of hopeless resignation. There are certain souls, and I have just perceived that mine is among them, who experience a real satisfaction in knowing that all is lost and that the time for surrender has arrived."

"Oh, I hope," said Athos, "that the time is not yet come for such an extremity."

"When you say so, M. le Comte, when you attempt to restore hope to my heart, you cannot have a clear comprehension of the meaning of my words. I came to Blois, count, to ask alms of my brother Louis, to ask a million, which, I had every reason to expect, would have ensured the triumph of my cause, and my brother Louis refused me. You see, then, that all is lost."

"Will your Majesty permit me to express an opinion which is the direct reverse of your own?"

"What do you mean, count? Do you class me among the vulgar herd and consider me too weak-minded to look my position full in the face?"

"Sire, it has been my experience that the more desperate the position, the more likely is the sudden advent of a great change of fortune."

"Thanks, count, it is good to know a heart like yours, a heart that has confidence enough in God and in the monarchy to keep it from ever despairing of the fortunes of royalty, no matter how low they may have fallen. Unhappily, your words, my dear count, resemble those medicaments known as sovereign remedies, which may heal such maladies as are curable, but are doomed to failure in presence of death. I thank you, count, for the efforts you make to console me; I thank you for your ever-mindful devotion, but I know now what I have to expect, I know now that nothing can save me. Nay, my friend, I am so convinced of the fact that I am again going into exile with my old servant Parry; I am again going to sup full of sorrow in the little hermitage which Holland offers me. There, you may rest assured, count, all will soon be over, and death will come speedily; it has been summoned too often by a body that is tortured by the soul and by a soul that longs for heaven!"

"Your Majesty has a mother, a sister, brothers; your Majesty is the head of your family; it is, therefore, your duty to pray to God for a long life rather than for a speedy death. Your Majesty is an exile, a fugitive, but you have right on your side, and what you ought to long for are combats, dangers, action of every sort, and not the repose of those who have gained heaven."

"Count," said Charles II., with a smile of inexpressible sadness, "did you ever hear of a king winning back his kingdom with an old servant like Parry and with the three hundred crowns in that servant's purse?"

"No, Sire; but I have heard, and heard more than once, of a dethroned king winning back his kingdom when aided by a firm and persistent will, a few friends, and a million of francs skilfully employed."

"Why, surely, you cannot have understood me? I asked that million of my brother Louis, and he refused me."

"Sire," said Athos, "will you deign to grant me a few minutes and listen to a statement I am in duty bound to make to your Majesty?"

Charles II. looked steadily for a moment at Athos.

"With pleasure, monsieur," said he.

"Then I will ask your Majesty to accompany me;" and the count directed his steps towards the house.

He conducted the King into his study, and begged him to be seated.

"Sire," said he, "your Majesty told me just now that, in view of the present situation of affairs in England, a million would be amply sufficient to enable you to win back your kingdom."

"At least to make the attempt, and die as a king if I did not succeed."

"Will your Majesty, then, graciously remember your promise and listen patiently to what I have to say?"

Charles assented by a nod. Athos walked to the door, which he bolted, after looking to see if anybody was near, and then returned.

"Sire," said he, "your Majesty has been pleased to remember that I was of some assistance to the most noble and most unfortunate Charles I. when his executioners led him from Saint James to Whitehall."

"Yes, most assuredly I remember it, and shall always remember it."

"Sire, it is a heart-breaking story for a son to listen to, and one which you have doubtless often heard already, and yet I shall have to repeat it to your Majesty, without omitting a single detail."

"Speak, monsieur."

"When the King your father mounted the scaffold, or, rather, passed from his chamber to the scaffold which had been erected immediately outside his window, everything had been prepared for his escape; the executioner had been got out of the way; a hole had been made under the floor of his apartment; I myself was under the funereal block, which I heard, all of a sudden, creak beneath his feet."

"Parry has related to me all these terrible details, monsieur."

"But there is something he has not been able to relate to you, Sire, for what I am about to mention passed between God, your father, and myself, and I have never revealed it even to my dearest friends. 'Go a little further off,' said the august victim to the masked executioner; 'it is only for an instant, and I know I belong to you. But remember not to strike before I give the signal. I wish to pray without being disturbed.'"

"Excuse me," interrupted Charles II., turning pale; "but have you, count, you who are familiar with so many of the

details of this horrible event of which no one else, as you have just stated, has any knowledge, have you ever learned the name of that infernal executioner, the monster who concealed his face that he might assassinate a king with impunity?"

Athos became somewhat pale.

"His name?" said he; "yes, I know it, but I cannot tell it."

"And what became of him? Every one in England seems to be ignorant of his fate."

"He is dead."

"But he did not die in his bed, he did not die a calm and peaceful death, he did not die the death that comes to the innocent?"

"He died a violent death, during a terrible night, died exposed to the anger of men and a furious tempest sent by God. His body, pierced by a dagger, disappeared in the depths of the ocean. God pardon his slayer!"

"Then let us say no more about him," said King Charles, who saw that the count was reluctant to pursue the subject.

"The King of England, after addressing the masked executioner in the manner I have described, added: 'You must not strike before I hold out my hands and utter the word "Remember!"'"

"Yes," said Charles in a hollow voice, "I am aware that that was the last word pronounced by my unhappy father. But for what purpose, and for whom?"

"For the French gentleman standing under the scaffold."

"Then it was for you, monsieur?"

"Yes, Sire, and every word he spoke to me through the boards of the scaffold and the black cloth that covered it still echoes in my ears. After that the King knelt down. 'Comte de la Fère,' said he, 'are you there?' 'Yes, Sire,' I answered. The King then leaned forward."

Charles II., worked up to a pitch of passionate interest, convulsed with grief, in his eagerness not to miss a single syllable uttered by the count, leaned forward also, until his head almost touched the head of Athos.

"The King then leaned forward," continued the count. "'Comte de la Fère,' said he, 'you could not save me, it was fated that I should not be saved. Now, even though I may be guilty of committing a sacrilege, I will speak to you. I have

spoken to men, I have spoken to God, my last words shall be addressed to you. In upholding a cause I believed sacred, I have lost the throne of my fathers and endangered the heritage of my children.'"

Charles II. hid his face in his hands, and bitter tears trickled down between his slender white fingers.

"'I have still a million left, all in gold,' continued the King; 'I buried it in the cellars of the Castle of Newcastle shortly before I left the city.'"

Charles raised his head, with a mingled expression of joy and pain which would have wrung tears from any one acquainted with his terrible misfortunes.

"A million!" he murmured. "Oh, count!"

"'You alone know of the existence of this money. Use it whenever you think it can be of the greatest service to my eldest son. And now, Comte de la Fère, farewell!'

"'Farewell! farewell, Sire!' I answered."

Charles II. rose and went to the window, against which he leaned his feverish head.

"It was then that the King uttered the word 'REMEMBER!' and that word was addressed to me. You see, Sire, that I have remembered."

The prince was entirely overpowered by his emotion. Athos perceived this from the movements of his shoulders, which shook convulsively. He heard the sobs which burst from his overcharged breast. He was silent, for he was himself almost choked by the tide of bitter memories he had poured on this royal head.

Charles II., after a violent effort, left the window, checked his tears, and sat down again by the side of Athos.

"Sire," said the count, "until now I believed that the time had not yet arrived for the employment of this last resource, but yet, having my eyes constantly fixed on England, I also believed that that time was rapidly drawing nigh. To-morrow it was my intention to find out in what part of the world your Majesty was living and to start for it immediately. But you have come to me instead. It is a sign that God is on our side."

"Monsieur," answered Charles, in a voice that still trembled with emotion, "you are for me what an angel sent by God might be; you are my savior, sent to me from the tomb by my father himself; but now that ten years of civil war have

swept over my country, maddening its people and devastating its soil, there is probably as little gold left in the bowels of the earth as there is love in the hearts of my subjects."

"Sire, the spot in which his Majesty buried this million is well known to me, and I am quite certain no one has been able to discover it. And then, has the Castle of Newcastle been entirely destroyed? Has it been demolished stone by stone, and has the ground upon which it rested been utterly uprooted?"

"No, it is still standing, but at this very moment it is the headquarters of General Monk. And so you see the only place which might afford me help, the only place which still contains some of my property, is in the hands of my enemies."

"General Monk, Sire, cannot have discovered the treasure of which I am speaking."

"Yes, but how can I reclaim this treasure unless I go to General Monk and place myself in his power? Ah, count, you must surely perceive that it is time for me to yield to fate, since, whenever I try to rise, it hurls me again to the earth. Can I succeed with Parry alone to aid me, Parry, whom Monk has already banished from his camp? No, no, count, better accept this final defeat."

"What your Majesty cannot do, and what Parry has no longer the strength to do, do you not believe that I could succeed in doing?"

"You! would you go, count?"

"Yes, I will go, if your Majesty has no objection."

"And you so happy here, count!"

"I am never happy, Sire, when a duty remains to be fulfilled, and the duty bequeathed me by your royal father, the duty of watching over your fortunes and using his money for the advancement of the royal cause, takes precedence of all other duties. Let your Majesty give but the signal, and I will at once accompany you."

"Ah, monsieur!" exclaimed the King, as, oblivious of all royal etiquette, he threw himself on the neck of Athos; "you convince me that there is a God in heaven, a God who sometimes sends his messengers to the unfortunate who groan on earth."

Athos, quite affected by this outburst of feeling, thanked the young prince with profound respect, and approaching the window:

"Grimaud," said he, "my horses."

"What! you are starting immediately?" asked the King. "Ah! you are, beyond a doubt, a wonderful man, monsieur."

"Sire," answered Athos, "I know of nothing more urgent than your Majesty's service. Besides," he added, with a smile, "it is an old habit of mine, contracted a long time ago in the service of the Queen your aunt, and the King your father. Why should I lose it at the very time it is needed for the service of your Majesty?"

"What a man!" murmured the King.

Then, after reflecting a moment:

"No, no, count, I cannot consent to expose you to such privations. I have no means of rewarding such services as yours."

"Forsooth!" answered Athos, laughingly, "your Majesty is pleased to jest with me; have you not a million? Why, if I had hoped to possess such a sum as that, I would have already raised a regiment. But, thanks be to God, Sire, I have still a few rouleaus of gold and a few family diamonds. Your Majesty will, I hope, condescend to share them with a devoted servant."

"With a friend. Yes, count, but on condition that this friend will, in turn, share with me hereafter."

"Sire," said Athos, opening a casket, from which he took gold and jewels, "I am afraid we are really too rich. Luckily, if we happen to meet robbers, there will be four of us."

The pale cheeks of Charles II. flushed now with joy. He saw that the two horses of Athos had been led by Grimaud, who was already booted for the journey, up to the colonnade.

"Blaisois," said the count, "this letter is for the Vicomte de Bragelonne. If any one inquire, say I have gone to Paris. I entrust the house to your care, Blaisois."

Blaisois bowed, embraced Grimaud, and shut the gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH ARAMIS IS SOUGHT AND ONLY BAZIN FOUND.

Two hours had hardly elapsed since the departure of the master of the house, who, so long as Blaisois could see him, kept on the road to Paris, when a horseman, mounted on a spirited piebald, halted before the gate, and with a resonant "Hollo!" summoned the grooms, who with the gardeners had gathered around Blaisois, chronicler in ordinary to the castle menials. Maître Blaisois had doubtless heard this "Hollo!" before, for he turned round and cried:

"M. d'Artagnan! Run quick, you fellows, and open the gate!"

Eight nimble young lads hurried to the iron gate and flung it open with as much ease as if it had been made of feathers. Then there was almost a squabble among them for the honor of waiting on him; they knew how their master always received this friend of his, and it is easy enough to discover the amount of favor accorded to a guest by his host, by seeing how the servants regard him.

"Ah!" said M. d'Artagnan, with his most agreeable smile, as he steadied himself in the stirrup preparatory to dismounting, "where is my dear count?"

"Oh, monsieur, what a misfortune for you!" said Blaisois, "and what a misfortune also for M. le Comte our master, when he learns of your visit! It happens, by a cruel stroke of destiny, that M. le Comte went away nearly two hours ago."

This was too much of a trifle to embarrass D'Artagnan.

"No matter," said he. "However, as I see your French style is still absolutely classical, you must give me a lesson in grammar and elegant diction while I am waiting for the return of your master."

"Impossible, monsieur!" answered Blaisois; "if you were to wait for his return you would have to wait a very long time."

"Then he won't be back to-day?"

"No, nor to-morrow, nor the day after that. M. le Comte has gone on a journey."

"A journey!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "you are trying to deceive me!"

"No, monsieur, I am telling you the plain truth. M. le Comte has done me the honor to place me in charge of the mansion, and he added, in that voice of his which is at once so gentle and so authoritative, — at least, it is so when addressed to me, — 'You will say I have gone to Paris.'"

"Well, if he is on the road to Paris, that's all I want to know, and you should have told me so in the beginning, you donkey! So he is two hours ahead of me?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Oh, I'll soon catch up with him. Is he alone?"

"No, monsieur."

"Whom has he with him?"

"A young gentleman I never saw before, an old man, and Grimaud."

"A company of that kind cannot get on as fast as I can. I'll start at once."

"May I ask you, monsieur, to deign to listen to me for a moment?" inquired Blaisois, laying his hands gently on the reins of the horse.

"Yes, if you're not grandiloquent, and say what you have to say quickly."

"Well, monsieur, the word 'Paris' is simply a blind."

"Oho!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, becoming serious at once; "a blind?"

"Yes, monsieur; that M. le Comte had no intention of going to Paris I am ready to swear."

"What makes you think so?"

"This. M. Grimaud always knows where our master is going; now, he had promised me that the first time he should go to Paris he would take charge of some money I wished to send to my wife."

"Indeed! so you have a wife, then?"

"I had one; she was born in the neighborhood. M. le Comte, however, thought her tongue ran too fast, and I sent her to Paris; her absence troubles me at times, but at times it is also a source of much satisfaction to me."

"I can easily understand that; but continue. You do not believe, then, that the count has gone to Paris?"

"No, monsieur; if that were so, Grimaud would have broken his word, would have perjured himself, in fact, which is impossible."

"Which is impossible," repeated D'Artagnan, thoughtfully, for he was now quite convinced. "Well, my good Blaisois, thanks."

Blaisois bowed.

"But, by the way, — you know I am not inquisitive — I have business of the utmost importance with your master, — could you not — drop me a little hint — I 'll understand, there is so much pith in everything you utter — just a syllable — I 'll guess the rest."

"Upon my word, monsieur, I am unable to do so; I am absolutely ignorant of the object of M. le Comte's journey. To listen at doors is abhorrent to my nature, and, besides, it is impossible to do so here with safety."

"Well, my dear fellow, I have made a bad beginning. It can't be helped, though. You know, at least, the date of the count's return?"

"As little as I know of the place to which he is going."

"Come, now, Blaisois; come, reflect."

"Monsieur doubts my sincerity! Ah, monsieur, you lacerate my feelings cruelly."

"Devil take that smooth tongue of his!" growled D'Artagnan. "A bumpkin would give me more satisfaction with a couple of words! Good-bye."

"Monsieur, I have the honor to present you my respects."

"The conceited prig!" muttered D'Artagnan. "The rascal is insupportable."

He gave one more glance at the house, turned his horse's head, and started on his way, seemingly without a care on his mind.

When he had passed the wall and was out of sight:

"And now let me consider," said he, breathing quickly; "was Athos there, after all? No. All those lazy fellows, standing in the yard with their arms folded, would have been as busy as bees if they had been under a master's eye. Athos gone on a journey! — I can make nothing of it. But — bah! he is the very devil for mystery. Well, now I think of it, he is not the man I want. The man I 'm on the lookout for must be cunning as well as patient. I fancy I 'll find what I want at Melun, in a certain presbytery with which I am not unacquainted. Forty-five leagues! That means four days and a half! No matter, the weather is fine, and I am free; but I 'll have to make the most of my time."

And he set his horse to a trot on the road to Paris. On the fourth day he was at Melun, as he expected.

It was D'Artagnan's habit never to ask his way or put the usual hackneyed questions to those he met. In such matters he relied, except in very grave circumstances, on a penetration that never failed him, an experience of thirty years, and a trained capacity for reading the physiognomies of houses, as well as those of men.

It did not take D'Artagnan much time to find the presbytery, a charming brick house coated with plaster, with vines creeping along the gutters and a sculptured stone cross on the peak of the roof. From a hall on the ground floor escaped a noise, or, rather, a confused buzz of voices, which resembled the chirping of birdlings when the brood has just been hatched under the down. One of these voices was evidently trying to spell out the letters of the alphabet. Another voice, at once heavy and shrill, was reproving the chatterers and correcting the mistakes of the reader.

D'Artagnan recognized the voice, and, as the window of the hall was open, he stooped down from his horse under the branches and leaves of the vines, and cried:

"Bazin! Good-day, my dear Bazin!"

A stout, low-sized man, with a flat face, a skull adorned with a crown of gray hairs, cut so as to resemble a tonsure, and covered with an old black velvet skull cap, rose as soon as he heard D'Artagnan. *Rose* is hardly the proper epithet, however; it would be more correct to say he *bounded*. In fact, Bazin bounded, at the same time taking up his little low seat, of which the children tried to relieve him, fighting more fiercely for its possession than did the Greeks when they endeavored to rescue the dead body of Patroclus from the Trojans.

"You!" he exclaimed; "you, M. d'Artagnan!"

"Yes, I. Where is Aramis — no, the Chevalier d'Herblay — oh, another blunder — I mean the very reverend vicar general?"

"Oh, monsieur," answered Bazin, with dignity, "monseigneur is in his diocese."

"What do you mean?" asked D'Artagnan.

Bazin repeated the sentence.

"You don't say that Aramis has a diocese?"

"Yes, monsieur. Why not?"

"And so he 's a bishop?"

"Why, where in the world have you come from not to know that?" said Bazin, rather disrespectfully.

"My dear Bazin, we poor swordsmen are little better than pagans; we know all about it when a man is made a colonel, a general, or a marshal of France; but when a man is made a bishop, an archbishop, or a pope, devil take me if the three-fourths of the world don't know all about it before it comes within a mile of us."

"Hush! hush!" said Bazin, his eyes starting from his head with horror, "do not attempt to corrupt these children whom I am trying to imbue with righteous sentiments."

The children had, in fact, gathered about D'Artagnan, whose horse, long sword, spurs, and martial appearance filled them with admiration. They admired his strong voice particularly, and when he rapped out his oath, the entire school shouted, "Devil take me!" with a frightful accompaniment of bursts of laughter, shrieks of delight, and stampings on the floor, which gladdened the musketeer's heart, and drove the old pedagogue crazy.

"Stop that, you brats!" he cried; "silence! There now, see what your coming has done, M. d'Artagnan! All my good principles scattered to the winds! But wherever you appear disorder reigns, and Babel is sure to follow you. Ah, good Lord! They have gone mad!"

And the worthy Bazin laid about him right and left, and his pupils screamed louder than ever, but for a different reason.

"You cannot debauch anybody here; at least, if I can prevent it!" said he.

"Are you quite sure I can't?" answered D'Artagnan, with a smile that made Bazin shake with terror.

"Yes, he 'd do it!" he murmured.

"Where is your master's diocese?"

"Monseigneur is the Bishop of Vannes."

"And who got him appointed?"

"Why, of course, our neighbor, Monsieur the Superintendent."

"So he and Aramis are good friends?"

"Monseigneur used to preach every Sunday at Vaux, in the house of Monsieur the Superintendent; then they hunted together."

"Ah!"

"And Monsieur the Superintendent sometimes helped monseigneur in the composition of his homilies — no, I mean his sermons."

"Bah! Why, then, this excellent prelate of yours preaches in verse, does he?"

"For goodness' sake do not jest at sacred things!"

"There, Bazin, that will do! Aramis is at Vannes, then?"

"At Vannes, in Brittany."

"You sneaking old hypocrite, you know you 're lying."

"You can see for yourself, monsieur; his apartments in the presbytery are vacant."

"He 's speaking the truth," was D'Artagnan's conclusion, after a rapid survey of the house, which convinced him it was deserted.

"Surely monseigneur must have notified you of his promotion?"

"When did it occur?"

"A month ago."

"Oh, in that case there 's no time lost. Plainly Aramis does not yet require my services. But, by the way, Bazin, why do you not follow your pastor?"

"I cannot, monsieur, I am too busy."

"With your alphabet?"

"And my penitents."

"What! you hear confessions? So you are a priest!"

"Almost the same as one. I have such a strong vocation!"

"Ay, but have you orders?"

"Oh," answered Bazin, with the utmost coolness, "I shall soon have my orders, or, at the very least, my dispensations."

And he rubbed his hands.

"I see I must give it up," D'Artagnan muttered; "no chance of persuading these people to change their quarters. Get me something to eat, Bazin."

"With the greatest pleasure, monsieur."

"Some soup, a fowl, and a bottle of wine."

"To-day is Saturday, a day of abstinence, monsieur," said Bazin.

"I have a dispensation," answered D'Artagnan.

Bazin eyed him suspiciously.

"Tut, you canting rascal! whom do you take me for?" said the musketeer; "if you, who are only the bishop's underling, expect a dispensation that will leave you at liberty to commit a

crime, why should not I, his friend, have one to enable me to eat meat when my stomach craves for it? Bazin, you had better be sociable with me, for if you are n't, by heaven, I 'll complain to the King, and then where are you and your confessions? You know the King nominates the bishops, and as I can do what I like with the King, I can make myself unpleasant."

Bazin smiled hypocritically.

"Ah, but Monsieur the Superintendent is on our side," said he.

"And so you make no account of the King?"

Bazin did not answer, but his smile said enough.

"See to my supper," said D'Artagnan. "It is now nearly seven."

Bazin turned away and gave orders to the oldest of his pupils to notify the cook. Meanwhile D'Artagnan continued his examination of the presbytery.

"Humph!" said he, disdainfully, "your most reverend bishop is lodged in rather shabby quarters."

"We have the Castle of Vaux."

"And that, I suppose, is as fine as the Louvre?" sneered D'Artagnan.

"Finer," replied Bazin, with the utmost serenity.

"Indeed!" retorted D'Artagnan.

He would have doubtless prolonged the discussion and defended the superiority of the Louvre had he not seen that his horse was tied to the bars of a gate.

"What the devil!" he cried; "is that the way you take care of my horse, a beast there is n't the equal of in your master's stables?"

Bazin looked askance at the horse and answered:

"The superintendent sent us four horses from his stables, and every one of them is worth four of yours."

D'Artagnan became crimson. His hand itched, and he surveyed the head of Bazin, just to see where a blow would be most effective. But the impulse quickly vanished. Reflection came, and he contented himself with saying:

"Devil take me if I did not do well to quit the King's service! Say, my honest friend," he added, "how many musketeers has the superintendent?"

"He could have all there are in the kingdom with his money," answered Bazin, shutting his book and dismissing his young scholars, first taking care to cane them soundly as a warning.

"The devil! the devil!" ejaculated D'Artagnan.

The cook came to inform him that he was served. He followed her to the dining-room, where his supper was waiting for him.

D'Artagnan sat down and made a vigorous assault on his fowl.

"I really think," he murmured, exercising his sharp teeth on the hen, which nobody evidently ever had thought of fattening before killing, "I really think I have acted foolishly in not going at once to the superintendent and taking service under him. From all I learn, the superintendent must be a most puissant grandee. In good sooth, we hangers-on at court are a set of ignoramuses; the rays of the sun hinder our view of the big stars, which are suns, too, just a little farther off from our planet, that 's all."

As D'Artagnan, from pleasure as well as from habit, was very fond of getting people to talk about matters in which he took an interest, he did some very adroit fencing with Maître Bazin, but it was beating the air. Beyond his wearisome and hyperbolical eulogies on the superintendent, Bazin, who was on his guard, refused to feed the lieutenant's curiosity with anything except platitudes; so the officer told him, in high ill-temper, that he would go to bed as soon as his supper was finished.

D'Artagnan was ushered by Bazin into a poorly furnished bedroom, containing an uncomfortable-looking bed, but D'Artagnan was easily suited. He had been informed that Aramis had taken the keys of his apartments along with him, and as he knew that Aramis, besides being a very methodical person, usually kept many things in his rooms he would not care to have others see, he was not at all surprised. He attacked the bed, then, as courageously as he had done the fowl, although it was, perhaps, the harder of the two, and as he was as good a sleeper as he was an eater, it did not take him more time to slumber soundly than it had done to pick the last bone of his roast hen.

Since he was no longer in anybody's service, D'Artagnan was determined that henceforth his rest should be as unbroken as it had once been the opposite; but, despite D'Artagnan's sincere resolution to keep the covenant he had made with himself religiously, he was aroused in the middle of the night by a loud noise of carriages and servants on horseback. Then his

room was suddenly illuminated; he jumped out of bed and ran to the window in his shirt.

"Can the King be coming this way?" he asked himself, rubbing his eyes. "Only a royal personage could really have such a retinue as that."

"Long live the superintendent!" cried, or rather bawled, a voice at a window on the ground floor, a voice he recognized as that of Bazin, who, while shouting, waved a handkerchief with one hand and held a big candle in the other.

D'Artagnan fancied he perceived a human form, magnificently apparelled, leaning out of the window of the principal carriage; at the same time loud bursts of laughter, evidently excited by the queer appearance of Bazin, rose from the same carriage, and then the cortege disappeared rapidly, leaving a trail of joy behind it.

"I should have known it could not have been the King," said D'Artagnan; "there is no such light-hearted laughter where the King passes. Hullo, Bazin!" he shouted to his neighbor, who had thrust three-fourths of his body outside the window, so that he might see the carriage as long as he could, "what is all the excitement about?"

"It is about M. Fouquet," answered Bazin, patronizingly.

"And who are all those people?"

"They belong to the court of M. Fouquet."

"Oh, indeed! Have you any notion what M. de Mazarin would say if he heard all this?"

And he went back to his couch, in a brown study; he was wondering how it came to pass that Aramis always managed to gain the protection of the most powerful men in the realm.

"Is it because he is luckier than I am," he thought, "or because I am a greater fool than he is? Bah!"

Now that D'Artagnan had been transformed into a sage, it was with this interjection that he usually terminated all his thoughts and all his sentences. Once on a time he would clap you a *mordioux!* into a period, just as he would clap a spur into the side of his steed; but he had grown old, and so he murmured this philosophic "Bah!" as if it were a sort of curb for all his passions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN SEEKS PORTHOS AND FINDS ONLY MOUSQUETON.

When D'Artagnan had become quite convinced that M. le Vicaire Général d'Herblay was undoubtedly absent, and that it was useless trying to find his friend either in Melun or in any place in its neighborhood, he took leave of Bazin, not at all regretfully, gave a surly glance at the magnificent Castle of Blois, already showing promise of the splendor that was to prove its builder's ruin, and, pursing up his lips, like a man who was exceedingly distrustful and suspicious, he clapped spurs to his piebald, saying:

"Never mind! I'll find a better man and a better-filled coffer at Pierrefonds. These are all I need for carrying out my idea, and the idea is my own."

We will spare our readers the prosaic incidents of D'Artagnan's journey, which brought him into Pierrefonds on the morning of his third day's ride. He travelled by Nanteuil-le-Haudouin and Crécy and saw at some distance the Castle of Louis d'Orléans, one of those wonderful manors of the middle ages, with walls twenty feet thick and turrets a hundred feet high; it now formed part of the royal domains and was tenanted by an old caretaker.

He skirted its walls, measured its towers with his eyes, and then descended into the valley. Soon he was able to look down on the castle of Porthos, situated on the border of a vast pond and adjacent to a magnificent forest. As we have already described this mansion for the benefit of our readers, we shall content ourselves with merely mentioning it on the present occasion. The first object that attracted D'Artagnan's attention, after he had gazed on the stately trees, the green slopes turned to gold by the sun of May, and the long reach of tufted woods that stretch to Compiegne, was a large box on wheels, pushed forward by two lackeys and drawn by two others. In the box was a nondescript creature in green and gold, moving along the smiling avenues of the park in this singular fashion. At a distance it was absolutely impossible to make either head or tail out of this indistinct phenomenon. When it came somewhat nearer, it looked like a hogshead

wrapped up in green cloth plentifully bedizened with gold lace; when nearer still, it assumed the form of a man, or rather of a Brobdignagian, whose lower extremities had expanded until they filled the whole interior of the box; and, when close to our lieutenant, he saw that it was Mousqueton, Mousqueton as white-headed and red-faced as Punchinello himself.

"Why," cried D'Artagnan, "hang me if it is n't my dear friend M. Mousqueton."

"Ah!" exclaimed the enormous personage addressed; "ah! what happiness! what joy! M. d'Artagnan himself! Stop, you rascals!"

The last words were spoken to the lackeys engaged in pushing and dragging the vehicle. Thereupon the box came to a standstill, and the four lackeys, with military precision, doffed their laced hats and drew up behind it.

"Ah, M. d'Artagnan!" said Mousqueton, "why cannot I embrace your knees? But, as you see, I have become quite helpless."

"Oh, age, I suppose, my dear Mousqueton."

"No, monsieur, not age; a delicate constitution, and other tribulations."

"You delicate! you with tribulations, Mousqueton!" said D'Artagnan, making the tour of the box; "why, my dear friend, you must be mad. Thank God, you are as sound as an oak three hundred years old!"

"Ah, but my legs, monsieur! my legs!" protested the faithful servant.

"What is the matter with them?"

"They refuse to bear me any longer."

"The ingrates! And yet, from what I can see, you nourish them bountifully, Mousqueton."

"Alas! yes. Certainly they have no reason to complain," answered Mousqueton, with a sigh. "I have done all I could for my poor body. I am not selfish."

And Mousqueton heaved another sigh.

"Does Mousqueton sigh in that dismal fashion because he, too, wants to be a baron?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Good heavens! monsieur," exclaimed Mousqueton, rousing himself from what was evidently a painful reverie; "but won't monseigneur be pleased that you have thought of him!"

"Kind-hearted Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan; "how I long to embrace him!"

"Oh!" said Mousqueton, deeply affected, "I 'll be sure to write and let him know."

"What!" cried D'Artagnan, "you 'll write to him?"

"This very day, and without a moment's delay."

"So he 's not here, then?"

"No, monsieur."

"But is he close by, or is he far off?"

"Eh! how can I tell, monsieur, how can I tell?"

"*Mordioux!*" exclaimed the musketeer, stamping with his foot. "I 'm fated to be unfortunate! And Porthos such a domesticated animal, too!"

"Monsieur, there is no one fonder of his home than monseigneur — but —"

"But what?"

"When a friend urges you —"

"A friend?"

"Yes, and such a distinguished friend as M. d'Herblay —"

"Then it was Aramis that urged Porthos?"

"I 'll tell you how it all happened, M. d'Artagnan. M. d'Herblay wrote to monseigneur —"

"You don't say so?"

"A letter, monsieur, such a pressing letter that it put us all in a ferment."

"Let me hear about it, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan; "but first tell your people to stand a little away, if you please."

Mousqueton roared out, "Fall back, you knaves!" with such explosive energy that his breath, without the words, was quite sufficient to disperse the four lackeys.

D'Artagnan sat down on one of the shafts of the litter and opened his ears.

"Monsieur," said Mousqueton, "about a week or ten days ago monseigneur got a letter from M. le Vicaire Général d'Herblay — yes, it must have been on Wednesday; it was the day of rural pleasures, consequently it was Wednesday."

"What do you mean by that?" inquired D'Artagnan; "the day of rural pleasures?"

"Yes, monsieur; in this delicious country our pleasures are so numerous that we were really overrun with them; and so we have been obliged to organize them systematically into several classes."

"How well I recognize my friend's passion for order there! Assuredly such an idea would never have occurred to me. But then, I have never been overrun with pleasures, so far as I am aware."

"You see that we were, however," said Mousqueton.

"And how did you set about organizing them, might I ask?"

"It 's a long story, monsieur."

"What of that! we have plenty of time; and then it's such a pleasure to listen to you, my dear Mousqueton, you are such a beautiful talker!"

"It is true," said Mousqueton, expressing by a significant nod his sense of the justice done to his merit, — "it is true that I have made great progress in the society of monseigneur."

"But I am waiting for an account of your classes of pleasures, Mousqueton, and waiting impatiently. I want to know if I have come at a good time."

"Ah, M. d'Artagnan!" said Mousqueton, dismally, "when monseigneur departed all the pleasures departed too."

"Well, my dear Mousqueton, try and remember."

"And with what day would you like me to begin?"

"Oh, you might as well begin with Sunday; it is the Lord's day, you know."

"With Sunday, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Our Sunday pleasures are religious pleasures: monseigneur attends mass, makes the bread offering, and has sermons preached to him by his chaplain in ordinary. It is not very amusing, but we are expecting a Carmelite from Paris who will replace our present chaplain and who, from what I am told, is a first-rate preacher. He will keep us awake, at least; our present chaplain always sends us to sleep. Our pleasures on Sunday, then, are religious; on Monday they are mundane."

"Really?" said D'Artagnan; "what do you mean by that, Mousqueton? Do tell me about the Monday pleasures, if you please."

"Monsieur, on Monday we go into society; we receive and return visits; we play on the lute, dance, make verses, and, to wind up, burn a little incense in honor of the ladies."

"Why, it is the very perfection of gallantry!" said the musketeer, who had all he could do in the world to keep from shaking with laughter.

"On Tuesday our pleasures are scholarly."

"Capital! And what may they be, my good Mousqueton? The full particulars, pray."

"Monseigneur has purchased a sphere, which I intend showing you; it fills the entire perimeter of the principal tower, all except a gallery he constructed above the sphere; the sun and moon are suspended from it by means of little cords and brass wires. All this revolves, and it is very beautiful. Monseigneur points out to me distant seas and countries; we have made up our minds never to go near them. It is wonderfully interesting."

"Wonderfully interesting! You never spoke a truer word," echoed D'Artagnan. "And on Wednesday?"

"Our pleasures are rural, as I have had the honor of informing you, M. le Chevalier. We contemplate monseigneur's sheep and goats; we set the shepherdesses a-dancing to the music of reeds and bagpipes, following the directions given in a book monseigneur has in his library entitled '*Les Bergeries*.' The author died about a month ago."

"M. Racan, perhaps?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"You 're right — M. Racan. But we do more than that. We angle in a little brook and afterwards dine, crowned with flowers."

"By my soul, your Wednesday is portioned out admirably. And what about Thursday? I 'm afraid poor Thursday must come to grief."

"Oh, no, monsieur; Thursday is not at all unfortunate," answered Mousqueton. "Olympic pleasures on Thursday! Oh, monsieur, it is superb! We summon all monseigneur's young vassals and make them hurl quoits, wrestle, and run races. Monseigneur, like myself, has had to give up running; but at quoits — monseigneur has no equal! And that is nothing to what he is when he uses his fists. Oh, monsieur, the consequences are then most distressing!"

"Distressing! How?"

"Yes, monsieur; monseigneur has been obliged to abandon the cestus. He cracked too many skulls, broke too many jaws, shattered too many ribs. The sport is certainly charming; but at last every one refused to play with him."

"So his wrist —"

"Is stronger than ever, monsieur. Monseigneur's legs have

given way a little, he acknowledges it himself; but their power has all gone into his arms, so that —"

"So that he can still knock down oxen with a blow."

"Oh, that's nothing; he can beat in walls. Why, lately he happened to be taking supper at the house of one of his farmers — you know how good-natured and condescending monseigneur is; well, when supper was over, he struck the wall a blow, just by way of a jest; the wall fell down, the roof fell along with it, and three men and an old woman were buried beneath the ruins!"

"Good God, Mousqueton! — and your master?"

"Some of the skin was peeled off his head. We bathed the wound with water sent us by the nuns. But his hand was not injured."

"Not injured?"

"Not injured, monsieur."

"Oh, confound those Olympic pleasures of yours! they must cost more than they are worth, for, what with widows and orphans —"

"All pensioned, monsieur. Monseigneur has devoted a tenth of his income to this purpose."

"Well, let us get to Friday," said D'Artagnan.

"Noble and warlike pleasures on Friday. We hunt, fence, train falcons, break in steeds. Then comes Saturday, which we devote to intellectual pleasures, storing our minds, examining monseigneur's pictures and statues, writing and designing; then we fire monseigneur's cannon."

"You design, then fire cannons?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "M. du Vallon is at once the most ingenious and amiable person I am acquainted with; but have you not forgotten another class of pleasures?"

"What ones, monsieur?" inquired Mousqueton, anxiously.

"Material pleasures."

Mousqueton blushed.

"What do you mean by that, monsieur?" said he, lowering his eyes.

"I mean a good table, good wine, an evening spent in passing round the bottle."

"Ah, monsieur, we hardly reckon them pleasures, we have them every day."

"Excuse me, my honest friend," returned D'Artagnan; "but

my attention has been so engrossed by your charming narrative that I have forgotten the chief object of our conversation, namely, why M. d'Herblay wrote to your master."

"True, monsieur," answered Mousqueton, "talking of our pleasures has distracted us. Well, monsieur, I'll give you the whole business in a nutshell."

"I'm all attention, my dear Mousqueton."

"On Wednesday —"

"The day for rural pleasures?"

"Yes. A letter arrived. I gave it to him with my own hands, for I had recognized the handwriting —"

"And then?"

"Monseigneur read it and cried out: 'Quick, my horses! my arms!'"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "another duel!"

"No, monsieur, it contained only these words: '*Dear Porthos: Start at once, if you care to arrive before the equinox* (*L'Equinoxe*). *I am waiting for you.*'"

"*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, musingly, "the matter was urgent, apparently."

"I should think so. Monseigneur set out on that very day, along with his secretary, to make sure of arriving in time."

"And do you think he arrived in time?"

"I hope so. Monseigneur, who, as you know, is a little excitable, repeated continually, 'Thunder in Heaven! who is this L'Equinoxe? Never mind. The fellow will have to be well mounted if he gets there before me.'"

"And you 're sure Porthos got there before him?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Of course I'm sure. This L'Equinoxe may be as rich as you please, but he has n't a horse to equal those in my master's stables!"

D'Artagnan was able to repress his desire to laugh, because the brevity of the letter of Aramis gave him plenty of food for thought. He followed Mousqueton, or rather Mousqueton's chariot, back to the castle. There he sat down to a sumptuous table, was treated like a king, but could draw nothing from Mousqueton; the faithful servitor wept freely enough; nothing, however, could be got out of him except tears.

After a night spent in an excellent bed, D'Artagnan pondered again on the meaning of Aramis' letter, felt somewhat anxious as to the nature of the relation of the equinox to the affairs

of Porthos, then, as it was all a puzzle, — unless Aramis had some love affair on hand which required that the days and nights should be equal, — he rode away from Pierrefonds as he had ridden away from Melun, as he had ridden away from the castle of the Comte de la Fère. He did so, however, with a certain degree of sadness, which was about as low as the darkest humors D'Artagnan ever reached. With head cast down, eyes fixed, and legs hanging loosely on his horse's flanks, he said to himself, with that vague dreaminess which sometimes rises to the highest eloquence:

"No more friends, no more future, no more anything! All my forces shattered, like the bundle of rods bound together by our last friendship! Alas! old age is coming fast, cold and inexorable, muffling up in its funereal shroud all that illumined and embalmed my youth; and soon, with its sweet burden on its shoulders, shall it plunge into the fathomless abyss of death!"

A shudder shook the Gascon's heart, that heart so brave and strong against all the misfortunes of life, and, for a few moments, the clouds seemed black to him, the earth slippery and loamy, like the earth of graveyards.

"Whither am I going?" said he to himself; "what can I do? alone, all alone — wifeless, childless, friendless" — And then he suddenly cried: "Bah!"

He clapped spurs to his steed, and the animal, whose recollection of the heavy oats of Pierrefonds was accompanied by no melancholy thoughts, showed he took the hint in good part by galloping two leagues.

"To Paris!" said D'Artagnan to himself.

And the next day he alighted in Paris.

His journey thither had taken him ten days.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT D'ARTAGNAN CAME TO PARIS FOR.

The lieutenant alighted at the sign of the Pilon d'Or, a shop in the Rue des Lombards. A good-looking man, wearing a white apron and stroking a gray mustache with his good-looking, big hand, uttered a joyous exclamation as soon as he perceived the piebald horse.

"M. le Chevalier!" he cried; "is it yourself, really?"

"Good day, Planchet!" was D'Artagnan's answer, as he stooped to enter the shop.

"Some one here, quick," shouted Planchet, "to see to M. d'Artagnan's horse, some one for his room, some one for his supper!"

"Thank you, Planchet! Good-day, lads!" said D'Artagnan to the eager assistants.

"May I send off those parcels of coffee, molasses, and raisins?" asked Planchet; "they are for the pantries of Monsieur the Superintendent."

"Send them off, by all means."

"It won't take a moment; then we 'll go to supper."

"Let us have supper by ourselves; I have something to say to you," said D'Artagnan.

Planchet looked at his master in a way that was full of meaning.

"Oh, be easy, you 'll hear nothing that is n't pleasant," continued D'Artagnan.

"So much the better, so much the better!"

And Planchet breathed again, while D'Artagnan sat down carelessly on a bale of corks and proceeded to examine his surroundings. It was a well-stocked establishment, and the odors of ginger, cinnamon, and ground pepper that came to the lieutenant's nostrils made him sneeze.

The shop-boys, happy at being near a warrior so renowned, a lieutenant of musketeers who could actually talk with the King, set to work with an enthusiasm that bordered on delirium, and served their customers with a scornful despatch that was remarked by more than one.

Planchet put away his money and made up his accounts, interrupting the operation now and then by addressing an obsequious compliment to his old master. In his dealings with his customers Planchet used the curt language and haughty familiarity of the wealthy tradesman who serves everybody. D'Artagnan observed this contrast with a pleasure we shall analyze later on. He witnessed the gradual approach of night; and finally, Planchet escorted him to a room on the first story where, amid bales and boxes, a table, very neatly set, awaited the two guests.

D'Artagnan had not seen Planchet for a year, and he spent the time afforded by a short intermission in observing him.

The intelligent Planchet was a little more rotund than formerly, but his face was not at all bloated. His brilliant eyes still played easily within their deep-sunk orbits, and that fatness which levels all the characteristic angularities of the human countenance had not yet touched either his high cheek-bones — the sure index of craft and cupidity — or his pointed chin, an equally sure index of subtlety and perseverance. Planchet was as majestic in his dining-room as in his shop. The repast to which he had invited his master was frugal, but it was quite Parisian: a roast from the baker's oven, with vegetables, salad, and dessert, borrowed from the same establishment. D'Artagnan was well pleased when the grocer drew from behind a pile of wood a bottle of that Anjou wine which had always been his favorite tipple.

"Formerly, monsieur," said Planchet, with a beaming smile, "it was I who drank your wine; now I am to have the happiness of seeing you drink mine."

"And, with God's help, friend Planchet, I shall, I hope, drink it for a long time to come, for I am now free."

"Free! A leave of absence, monsieur?"

"Unlimited."

"You have quitted the service?" asked Planchet in amazement.

"Yes, I am about to take a rest."

"And the King?" exclaimed Planchet, who could not believe the King could do without the services of such a man as D'Artagnan.

"Oh, the King will try his luck somewhere else. But we have had a good supper; you are in a happy frame of mind, and that disposes me to make a confidant of you; open your ears."

"They're open."

And Planchet, with a laugh that had more frankness than artfulness in it, uncorked a bottle of white wine.

"Ah, but you must n't deprive me of my reason."

"Oh, monsieur, when you lose your head, indeed —"

"You see, my head is my own at present, and I intend taking better care of it than ever. And first, let us speak about the finances. How is our money getting along?"

"Splendidly. The twenty thousand livres I received from you are still employed in my business and bring in nine per cent. I give you seven and gain two."

"And you are as well satisfied as ever?"

"Enchanted. Are you bringing me more?"

"Better than that — but are you in any need of more?"

"Oh, not at all. People are only too glad to entrust me with money now. I am extending my trade."

"You always intended to do so."

"I play a little at banking — I purchase the merchandise of my insolvent brethren and lend money to those who find it difficult to meet their engagements."

"Without usury?"

"Oh, monsieur! Last week I had two meetings on the Boulevard, all on account of that very word."

"And why?"

"I 'll tell you. It was all about a loan. The borrower gave as security a quantity of raw sugar which I could sell if the repayment was not made at a fixed date. I lent him a thousand livres. He did not pay. I sold the sugar for thirteen hundred livres. He learned it and demanded a hundred crowns. Of course I refused, insisting that I was able to get only nine hundred livres for them. He said I was practising usury. I begged him to say that over again behind the Boulevard. He 's an ex-guardsman, so he came; I passed your sword through his left thigh."

"Zounds! if that is not playing at banking with a vengeance!" said D'Artagnan.

"For anything above thirteen per cent. I fight," answered Planchet, — "on principle."

"Take only twelve," said D'Artagnan, "and call the balance premium and brokerage."

"You are right, monsieur. But your business?"

"Ah, Planchet, it 's a long story and not easy in the telling."

"Tell it, for all that."

D'Artagnan scratched his mustache like a man embarrassed by what he is going to confide to his confidant and not quite sure of his confidant either.

"An investment?" inquired Planchet.

"You 're right, it is."

"A good one?"

"Rather: four hundred per cent., Planchet."

Planchet struck his fist on the table with so much force that the bottles bounded as if terrified.

"Good Heaven! it 's not possible!"

"I think it will be more," said D'Artagnan, coldly, "but it is better not to be too sanguine."

"Oh, confound it, monsieur!" returned Planchet, drawing nearer; "why, it 's magnificent as it is! Can one put a good round sum into it?"

"Twenty thousand livres each, Planchet."

"But that is all you have, monsieur. For how long?"

"A month."

"And that will give us?"

"Fifty thousand livres each; reckon for yourself."

"Why, it 's prodigious! There must be a good deal of fighting for such a stake as that, though, must n't there?"

"I think myself we 'll have to do a little fighting," answered D'Artagnan, with the same serenity; "but this time, Planchet, there are two of us, and I am to do all the fighting."

"Oh! monsieur, I could n't for a moment allow —"

"Planchet, you can't meddle; you should have to give up your business."

"So it is n't in Paris?"

"No."

"Abroad?"

"In England."

"Ah! where they 're fond of speculating," said Planchet. "May I ask, without seeming too curious, the nature of the affair, monsieur?"

"Planchet, it is a restoration."

"Of monuments?"

"Yes, of monuments; we will restore Whitehall."

"A rather important undertaking. And you believe that in a month —"

"I 'll do it."

"Well, that 's your lookout, monsieur, and once you take a thing in hand, I am —"

"Yes, that is my lookout. I am pretty sure of myself — still, I am perfectly willing to ask your advice."

"You do me much honor, monsieur; but my acquaintance with architecture is limited."

"Planchet, you are wrong, you are an excellent architect, quite as good as myself for the affair in question."

"Thanks."

"I was, I confess, inclined to offer shares in the business to certain gentlemen you are acquainted with, but they are all

away from home. It is annoying, for I know no men of greater boldness and dexterity."

"Aha! so there will be competition? It won't be all plain sailing?"

"Oh, no, indeed, Planchet; not by any means."

"I am wild for further particulars, monsieur."

"You 'll have them; shut fast all the doors."

"Yes, monsieur."

And Planchet double-locked every one of them.

"Good; now come close to me."

Planchet obeyed.

"But open the window; the noise of the wagons and passengers will prevent any one from hearing us."

Planchet did as he was told, and the uproar that immediately filled the room, the cries, barkings, the jarring of wheels and stamping of feet deafened, in fact, D'Artagnan himself for a time. Then he drank a glass of white wine, and opened with these words:

"Planchet, I have an idea."

"Ah! monsieur, how well I recognize you there!" answered the grocer, gasping with emotion.

CHAPTER XX.

CONCERNING THE PARTNERSHIP FORMED IN THE RUE DES LOMBARDS, AT THE SIGN OF THE PILON D'OR, FOR THE WORKING OF M. D'ARTAGNAN'S IDEA.

After a moment's silence, during which D'Artagnan was apparently collecting, not one of his ideas, but all his ideas:

"Surely, my dear Planchet," said he, "you have heard about Charles I., King of England?"

"Alas! yes, monsieur. Why should n't I? You left France to help him, and, in spite of your help, he fell, and was nearly dragging you down with him."

"Exactly; I see you have a good memory, Planchet."

"Plague take it, monsieur! no matter how bad a memory I had, it would be queer if I did n't recollect that, especially as it was related to me by Grimaud, who, as you know, does not shine as a relator, how you travelled half the night in a scuttled

boat and saw rising from the waves our worthy friend Mordaunt, with a certain gold-hilted dagger in his breast; you don't forget such things as that."

"And yet there are people who forget them, Planchet."

"Yes, those who never saw them, or never heard Grimaud relate them."

"So much the better, then. As you recollect all that, I shall have to recall to your memory only one fact, namely, that Charles I. had a son."

"Monsieur, far be it from me to contradict you, but he had two," said Planchet. "I saw the second, the Duke of York, in Paris, one day; he was going to the Palais-Royal, and I was informed he was only the second son of Charles I. As for the eldest, I have the honor of knowing his name, but I never saw him."

"Ah! right, Planchet, we have come at last to the question, which concerns this eldest son, formerly called the Prince of Wales, to-day called Charles II., King of England."

"King without kingdom, monsieur," was the sententious answer of Planchet.

"Yes, Planchet, and, you might add, an unfortunate prince, more unfortunate than any poor devil in the vilest slum in Paris."

Planchet made a gesture indicative of that banal compassion we accord to strangers with whom we never expect to find ourselves in contact. Moreover, in this politico-sentimental operation he could not discern the slightest glimmer of M. d'Artagnan's commercial idea, the idea in which his interest had been cleverly aroused; for D'Artagnan, who, from his wide experience, understood men and affairs equally well, understood Planchet.

"And now I have come to the point. This young Prince of Wales, 'king without kingdom,' according to your eloquent expression, Planchet, has interested me, me, D'Artagnan. I have seen him begging aid from Mazarin — a selfish time-server — and from Louis — a child, — and it struck me — and I am not blind in such matters — that in the penetrating eye of this throneless monarch, in the nobleness of his entire person, a nobleness that has survived all his miseries, there was the stuff of a true-hearted king."

Planchet nodded a tacit assent: all very fine, but it threw no light so far on D'Artagnan's idea. The latter continued:

"This, then, is how I reasoned the matter out. Pay close attention, Planchet, for we are coming to the end."

"I 'm all attention."

"Kings are not sown so thickly on the earth that people can always find them when they need them. Now this king without kingdom is, in my opinion, one of those garnered seeds that will blossom in any season whatever, provided that a dexterous, discreet, and vigorous hand have the sowing of it, selecting soil, temperature, and weather."

Planchet nodded anew, which proved anew that he was still in the dark.

"'Poor little king-seed!' I said to myself; and I assure you, Planchet, I was really affected, which leads me to fear I may, after all, be going on a fool's errand. And now you see why I should like to have your advice, my friend."

Planchet blushed with pride and pleasure.

"Poor little king-seed!" repeated the lieutenant, "shall I pick thee up and plant thee in good soil?"

"Ah! my God!" cried Planchet, staring at his old master as if he suspected he had taken leave of his senses.

"Eh? what 's the matter?" asked D'Artagnan; "what ails you?"

"Ails me? Oh, nothing, monsieur."

"But you said, 'Ah! my God!'"

"You 're sure?"

"I am, of course. It can't be you understand the affair already?"

"I am afraid, I confess, M. d'Artagnan, to —"

"Understand?"

"Yes."

"To understand that I want to give a throne to King Charles II., who is now without one? Is that your meaning?"

Planchet absolutely bounded from his chair.

"Ah! ah!" cried he, utterly scared; "so that 's what you call a restoration."

"Yes, Planchet; is not that the correct name?"

"No doubt, no doubt. But have you seriously reflected?"

"On what?"

"On things over there?"

"Where?"

"In England."

"And what are those things over there, may I ask, Planchet?"

"In the first place, monsieur, you will please excuse me for meddling with such matters, which have nothing to do with my business. Still, as you are offering me an investment — are you not offering me an investment, monsieur?"

"A superb one, Planchet."

"As you are offering me an investment, I have the right to investigate it."

"Investigate, Planchet; investigation is the source of light."

"Then, since I have your leave, monsieur, I wish to say that, to begin, there are parliaments over there."

"Good! What next?"

"Next there is an army."

"Good! Anything else?"

"The nation."

"Is that all?"

"The nation, which has consented to the dethronement and death of its king, the present King's father, will not care to give the lie to its acts."

"Planchet, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "you have n't a leg to stand on. The nation you talk of is tired to death of these gentlemen with their barbarous names and their psalm-singing. I have noticed, my friend, that, take one song with another, nations, as a rule, prefer catches to canticles. Do you remember the Fronde? Well, what kind of songs did they sing during those times? And they were good times, too."

"Not beyond measure; oh, no! I had a narrow escape from hanging in those good times."

"But you were n't hanged; now, were you?"

"No."

"And you began making your fortune in the midst of all those songs?"

"That 's true enough."

"Then what have you to say against them?"

"I beg your pardon, and come back to the army and the parliaments."

"I said I would borrow twenty thousand livres from M. Planchet and put twenty thousand of my own to it; with these forty thousand livres I raise an army."

Planchet wrung his hands; he saw D'Artagnan was serious; he had no doubt now that he had gone crazy.

"An army! Ah, monsieur!" he answered, with his most engaging smile, for he feared if he irritated this madman he might change him into a raging lunatic. "An army? — a large one?"

"Forty men," said D'Artagnan.

"Forty against forty thousand would seem hardly enough. Of course, you are yourself worth a thousand men, I know that well. But then where are you likely to find thirty-nine men equal to yourself? And supposing you found them, where could you get the money to pay them?"

"Not bad that, Planchet. Why, devil take me if you have n't become a courtier!"

"No, monsieur, I always say what I think, and so I say that I fear in the first pitched battle you fought with your forty men you might —"

"And therefore I will fight no pitched battle, my dear Planchet," returned D'Artagnan, laughing. "You will find in antiquity many fine examples of well-conducted retreats and marches, where the problem was to avoid the enemy instead of attacking him. Certainly you should know this, Planchet, you commanded the Parisians on the day they were to fight against the musketeers, and you marched and countermarched so skilfully that you never quitted the Palais-Royal."

Planchet gave a laugh.

"There 's no doubt about it," said he. "If your forty men keep always in hiding and are not bunglers they may hope not to be beaten. But of course you propose to attain some aim or other?"

"Decidedly. And now I 'll lay before you the method that, in my opinion, ought to be adopted for the speedy restoration of Charles II. to the throne."

"Good!" said Planchet, with renewed attention, "let us have your method. But, by the by, it looks as if we were forgetting something."

"What?"

"We have dismissed from our thoughts the nation which prefers catches to canticles and the army which we shan't have to fight. There are still the parliaments which don't sing often."

"And which never fights, either. How can such an intelligent man as you, Planchet, bother himself about a pack of brawlers, called *Rumps* and *Barebones?* The parliaments don't bother me, Planchet!"

"Oh, since they don't bother you, monsieur, let us go on."

"Yes, and we arrive at our aim. You remember Cromwell, Planchet?"

"I have heard a good deal about him, monsieur."

"He was a sturdy warrior."

"And more than that, a terrible eater."

"What do you mean?"

"At a single gulp he swallowed England."

"Well, then, Planchet, if, the day after he had swallowed England, some one had swallowed Cromwell?"

"Oh, monsieur, it is one of the first axioms in mathematics that the container must be greater than the thing contained."

"Good! Now you know our business, Planchet."

"But, monsieur, Cromwell is dead, and his container is now the tomb."

"My dear Planchet, I perceive you have not only become a mathematician, but a philosopher as well."

"Monsieur, in the grocery trade we have to use a large quantity of printed paper; I have got a great deal of knowledge from it."

"Bravo! You are aware, then, — for you haven't learned mathematics and philosophy without also learning history, — that a little Cromwell has come after the great Cromwell."

"Yes, his name is Richard, and he has done like you, M. d'Artagnan, he has given in his resignation."

"Capital! capital, indeed! Well, after the great man, who is dead; after the little man, who has given in his resignation, there has come a third. His name is Monk; he is a very able general, for he has never fought a battle, and a very formidable diplomatist, for he never speaks a word; before saying 'good day' to a man, he ruminates twelve hours, and at the end of them says 'good night;' whereupon every one cries that he is a prodigy, seeing that what he does say turns out to be the exact truth."

"He 's a masterhand, and no mistake," said Planchet; "but you are acquainted with another politician who is his match."

"M. de Mazarin, is it not?"

"The same."

"You 're right, Planchet; but M. de Mazarin does not aspire to the throne of France; that changes everything, you see. Well, this Monk, who has England on his plate before him, roasted to a nicety, and who has his mouth already open to

swallow her, this Monk, who says to Charles II.'s servants and to Charles II. himself, '*Nescio vos*' —"

"I do not know English," said Planchet.

"Yes, but I do," answered D'Artagnan. "'*Nescio vos*' means, 'I don't know you.' This Monk, when he has gobbled up England —"

"Well?" asked Planchet.

"Well, my friend, I go over there, and with my forty men I carry him off, pack him up, and bring him into France, where two expedients loom up before my dazzled eyes."

"And before mine!" cried Planchet, transported with enthusiasm. "We'll put him in a cage and exhibit him for money!"

"Capital! That is a third expedient of which I should never have thought; you are its sole author."

"Don't you think it a good one?"

"Certainly I do; but I think mine better."

"Let us see what is yours."

"I set a ransom on him."

"Of how much?"

"Confound it, man, a lad like that ought to be well worth a hundred thousand crowns!"

"Surely!"

"You see, then: *primo*, I set a ransom of a hundred thousand crowns on him —"

"Or else?"

"Or else — and it is better still — I hand him over to King Charles, who, once he has neither general to frighten him nor diplomatist to hoodwink him, will quietly restore himself, and, when restored, will count me down the hundred thousand crowns in question. That's my idea, Planchet; what do you say to it?"

"Magnificent, monsieur!" cried Planchet, trembling with emotion. "And how did this idea come to you?"

"It came to me one morning on the banks of the Loire, at a moment when our beloved monarch, Louis XIV., was whimpering over the hand of Mademoiselle de Mancini."

"Monsieur, I swear the idea is sublime. But —"

"Ah, there is a 'but,' then."

"Excuse me! — But it resembles slightly the skin of that fine bear, you know, which the man was sure to sell well, but which he had first to strip off the bear, and the bear was

still alive. Now, M. Monk can hardly be taken without a tussle — "

"Of course not, and so I raise an army."

"Yes, yes, I understand, understand perfectly — a surprise! Oh! in that case you are sure to succeed, for you have n't your match in a rencounter of that sort."

"I have had some success, it must be acknowledged," said D'Artagnan, with proud simplicity; "it must be plain to you that if, in the present case, I had with me my dear Athos, my stout-hearted Porthos, and my astute Aramis, the thing was done; but, seemingly, they are all lost, and no one knows where to find them. I will carry out the enterprise, then, alone. Now, does the business strike you as a good one and the investment as likely to be profitable?"

"Too much so! Too much so!"

"What do you mean?"

"Because such fine things never come off successfully."

"But this will, infallibly, Planchet, and the proof of the matter is that I am mixed up with it. The enterprise will be lucrative for you and interesting for me. People will say: 'You see what M. d'Artagnan was even in his old age;' and there will be stories about me; nay, I shall have my place in history, Planchet. I am ambitious of honor."

"Monsieur," cried Planchet, "when I think that it is here, in my own house, among my sugars and prunes and cinnamon, that this gigantic project has ripened, my shop seems to me to be transformed into a palace."

"Take care, Planchet, take care; if even a whisper of this transpired, there is the Bastille for both of us; take care, my friend, for it is a plot we are concocting. Monk is Mazarin's ally; take care!"

"Monsieur, when a man has the honor to belong to you, he is not afraid; when he has the honor of being united in a common interest with you, he is silent."

"Very well; it concerns you more than it does me, for in a week I shall be in England."

"Start, monsieur, start at once; the sooner the better."

"The money is ready, then?"

"It will be to-morrow; to-morrow you 'll receive it from my own hands. How will you have it — gold or silver?"

"Gold, it 's more convenient. But how are we to settle up about the affair? We must see to that."

"Oh, in the simplest way imaginable: you give me a receipt, nothing more is needed."

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, "there should be order in all business affairs."

"I agree with you there, monsieur, — but with you, M. d'Artagnan —"

"And supposing I die over there; supposing a musket ball kills me; supposing I burst from drinking their beer?"

"Monsieur, you may take my word for it that, were such a thing to happen, I should grieve too much at your death to care very much about the money."

"Thank you, Planchet, but that should be no reason for objecting; so, like two attorney's clerks, we 'll draw up an agreement, a sort of deed, which we may call a deed of partnership."

"With pleasure, monsieur."

"I know well it is n't an easy thing to do, but we can try."

"Then let us try."

Planchet went for pen, ink, and paper.

D'Artagnan took the pen, dipped it in the ink, and wrote:

"*Between Messire d'Artagnan, ex-lieutenant of the King's musketeers, now residing in the Rue Tiquetonne, Hôtel de la Chevrette.*

"*And the Sieur Planchet, grocer, residing in the Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or.*

"*Has been agreed as follows:*

"*A company with a capital of forty thousand livres is hereby formed for the purpose of working out an idea made over to the common stock by M. d'Artagnan.*

"*The Sieur Planchet, cognizant of this idea and approving the same in all respects, will pay twenty thousand livres into the hands of M. d'Artagnan.*

"*He will exact neither repayment nor interest until the return of the said M. d'Artagnan from a voyage, which the said M. d'Artagnan is about to make to England.*

"*On his side, M. d'Artagnan covenants to pay twenty thousand livres, to be added to the twenty thousand livres already disbursed by the Sieur Planchet.*

"*He will use the said sum of forty thousand livres according to his good pleasure, pledging himself, nevertheless, to an article hereunto attached.*

"*Upon the day upon which M. d'Artagnan shall have re-*

stored, by any means whatsoever, his Majesty King Charles II. to the throne of England, he will pay into the hands of M. Planchet the sum of —"

"A hundred and fifty thousand livres," said Planchet, artlessly, seeing that D'Artagnan hesitated.

"Ah, the devil, no!" answered D'Artagnan; "you can't have half, that wouldn't be fair."

"But each of us put in half of the amount, monsieur," objected Planchet, timidly.

"I know; but listen to the clause, my dear Planchet, and if you do not consider it just, after I write it, we'll erase it."

And D'Artagnan wrote:

"*Nevertheless, as M. d'Artagnan brings to the partnership, besides his capital of twenty thousand livres, his time, his idea, his labor, and his skin, matters in which he takes a keen interest, — particularly the last, — M. d'Artagnan will keep, out of the three hundred thousand livres, two hundred thousand for himself, making his share two-thirds.*"

"Very well," said Planchet.

"Is that fair?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Perfectly fair, monsieur."

"And you will be satisfied with a hundred thousand livres?"

"Hang it, I should think so! A hundred thousand livres for twenty thousand!"

"And in a month, too, you understand."

"How, in a month?"

"Yes, I only ask you for a month."

"Monsieur," said Planchet, generously, "I'll give you six weeks."

"Thank you, Planchet," answered the lieutenant, politely.

After which the two partners went over the deed again.

"It's perfect, monsieur," said Planchet. "Even the late M. Coquenard, the first spouse of Madame la Baronne du Vallon, could not have done better."

"You think so? Then let us sign."

And both set their hands to it.

"Now I am free from any obligation to anybody," said D'Artagnan.

"But I am not free from my obligation to you," said Planchet.

"Yes, for fondly as I cling to my skin, I may leave it over yonder, and then you would lose everything, Planchet. By

the way, that makes me think of the principal, an indispensable clause. I'll write it."

"*Should M. d'Artagnan fail in his task, the liquidation will be considered made, and the Sieur Planchet from that moment releases the shade of M. d'Artagnan from the obligation of paying back the said twenty thousand livres disbursed by the said Sieur Planchet into the funds of the said company.*"

This last clause disquieted Planchet; but when he saw his partner's sparkling eyes, his sinewy hands, and supple, vigorous back, he affixed his signature to the clause. D'Artagnan followed suit. In this fashion was drawn up the first deed of partnership known; perhaps such things have been abused a little since, both in form and principle.

"And now," said Planchet, pouring out the last glass of Anjou wine for D'Artagnan, "now, my dear master, you must go to bed."

"No," replied the musketeer, "for the hardest thing of all has yet to be done, and I want to ponder on that hardest thing."

"Bah!" exclaimed Planchet, "I have such confidence in you, M. d'Artagnan, that I would n't give my hundred thousand livres now for ninety thousand."

"And devil take me but I believe you are right!" said D'Artagnan.

Whereupon D'Artagnan took a candle, went upstairs, and then went to bed.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHEREIN D'ARTAGNAN GETS READY TO TRAVEL FOR THE HOUSE OF PLANCHET AND COMPANY.

D'Artagnan pondered to such purpose during the night that his plan was all arranged the next morning.

"I have it!" said he, sitting up in his bed and resting his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand; "I have it! I will search out forty reliable, stout-hearted fellows, picking them up from among the people who have had habits of discipline, but are not on the very best terms with the laws. I will promise them five hundred livres for a month if they return; if they do not return, then nothing, or half the amount for

their relatives. As to board and lodging, that concerns the English, who have oxen in their pastures, bacon in their larders, poultry in their poultry-yards, and grain in their granaries. With this band I will appear before General Monk. He will receive me. I shall gain his confidence and abuse it as soon as possible."

But D'Artagnan paused here, shook his head, and interrupted himself:

"No," said he, "I should never dare to tell all this to Athos; therefore this plan is not an honorable one. There must be violence," he continued, "violence must be employed, certainly, but I must not compromise my loyalty. With forty men I will ramble through the country as a partisan. Yes, but if I meet, not forty thousand Englishmen, as Planchet said, but just a mere four hundred? I shall be beaten, and out of my forty there are sure to be half a score of mulish rascals who will get themselves killed at the outset from sheer stupidity. No, you can't get forty perfectly reliable men; they don't exist. I must do with thirty. With ten less I can't be blamed for avoiding a warlike meeting on account of my small numbers, and if the meeting occurs my chances are much better with thirty than with forty. Moreover, I save five thousand francs, an eighth of my capital; that 's worth thinking of. It 's settled; I will have thirty men. I will divide them into three bands and scatter them over the country with orders to assemble again at a given moment. Thus, being divided into tens, we shan't excite any suspicion; we 'll pass unnoticed, in fact. Yes, yes, thirty, that 's the figure. And a marvellous number it is! You have three decades in it; three, the divine number. And certainly a company of thirty men, when united, will look rather imposing. But — ah! I am the sport of fortune!" continued D'Artagnan, "I 'll need thirty horses; that finishes me. Where the devil were my brains when I forgot the horses? But I cannot dream of doing anything without horses! Well, I suppose I must give them up, hoping to be able to seize them in the country itself, where they are not at all bad, either — But there again, hang it! I was forgetting. Three bands; that requires three leaders, and now I 'm in a hobble again. Of course I have one of the leaders at hand already; that 's myself. But the two others! — and they 'll cost me as much as the entire company. No, I shall have to be satisfied with a single lieutenant. In that case, then, I must

reduce my band to twenty. Twenty men, I am well aware, are not many, but since with thirty men I had determined to avoid a conflict, I will be even more cautious with twenty. Twenty is a round number; moreover, I shall need ten less horses, which is a consideration; and then, with a good lieutenant — *Mordioux!* don't patience and calculation work wonders! I was just on the point of embarking with forty men and now I have reduced them to twenty and my chances of success are as good as ever! nay, better; and I have saved ten thousand livres besides! At present all I have to do is to find my lieutenant; well, let me find him, then, and when — It's not so easy, after all; he has to be both brave and honest, the counterpart of myself. Ah! but a lieutenant will have my secret, and as this secret is worth a million livres and I pay him only a thousand, or fifteen hundred at the most, my man is sure to sell my secret to Monk. Away with the lieutenant, *mordioux!* Besides, were this man as mute as one of Pythagoras's disciples, he's certain to have some favorite or other in his band whom he will make a sergeant of, the sergeant will get hold of the lieutenant's secret, and, should the lieutenant turn out honest and refuse to sell it, the sergeant, being more unscrupulous and less ambitious, will surrender it entirely for fifty thousand livres. Evidently the lieutenant is impossible, quite impossible! But, in that case, I can't divide my company into two factions and act on two points at the same time. But what need is there of acting on two points, since we have only one man to take? What good is it to weaken a force by putting one part of it on the left there, and another on the right here? *Mordioux!* we'll have but a single force, a single body, and that body commanded by D'Artagnan! All very well, so far — still, twenty men, marching in one body, are pretty certain to arouse universal suspicion. No, my twenty cavaliers cannot march together. If they do, a company soon gets on their track and demands the password, and, as they show a little hesitation in giving it, this company shoots down M. d'Artagnan and his men like rabbits. I must be satisfied with ten men; in this way I shall exhibit simplicity and unity; I shall be compelled to be prudent, and, in such an enterprise as mine, prudence is half the battle; the larger number would have hurried me on into the commission of some folly, perhaps. There's no trouble in buying or taking ten horses. Gad, this is an excellent idea of mine! It has

poured a soothing balm into every one of my veins! No more suspicions, no more passwords, no more danger. Ten men may be ten servants or clerks. Ten men, leading ten horses laden with every sort of merchandise, are tolerated, received everywhere. These ten men are travelling through the country as agents for Planchet and Company of France. What objection can there be to that? These ten men, outwardly day-laborers, have each a good hunting-knife and a good musketoon hanging from his horse's flanks, and a good pistol in the holster. They are as cool as cucumbers, for, you see, they have no bad intentions. There may be a little touch of the smuggler about them at bottom; what if there is? Smuggling is not polygamy; no one hangs you for it. The worst that can happen to you is the confiscation of your wares. Much that will trouble us! Clearly, the plan is glorious. Ten men, then, ten men only, do I engage in my service, ten men as resolute as forty and costing not more than four, and, to insure absolute security, I will be dumb as to my object, simply saying to them: 'My friends, we have a bold stroke in hand.' With such precautions as this, the devil will have to be more artful even than usual if he play me one of his tricks. Fifteen thousand livres saved! saved out of twenty! — it beats everything!"

Exhilarated and confident after these ingenious calculations, D'Artagnan stopped right here, determined to make no alteration in his present resolution. His inexhaustible memory had already supplied him with a list of ten men, illustrious among adventurers, men ill-used by fortune or at odds with justice. D'Artagnan got out of bed and decided to search for them immediately, telling Planchet not to expect him for breakfast, perhaps not for dinner, either. A day and a half spent in rambling through certain tumbled-down old rookeries resulted in the acquisition of a charming collection of villainous countenances with villainous mouths that spoke a French far less pure than the English it was intended they should soon chatter. None of these adventurers had been put in communication with one another.

For the most part, they were ex-guardsmen, whose merits D'Artagnan had had many chances of appreciating in different skirmishes, men forced by drunkenness, untimely sword-thrusts, unexpected good luck at cards, or the economic reforms of M. de Mazarin, to take refuge in solitude and obscurity, those great consolers of belied and blighted souls.

They bore on their physiognomies and in their raiment the traces of the bruises that had been inflicted on their hearts. The faces of some were scarred, and the clothes of all were tattered. D'Artagnan relieved the neediest of those outcast brethren of his by a prudent distribution of the company's crowns, then, having seen to it that these crowns were devoted to the outward embellishment of his band, he appointed a place in the north of France, between Berghes and Saint-Omer, as the rendezvous of his recruits. He gave them only six days to be there, but he was so well acquainted with the good-will, good-humor, and relative integrity of these illustrious volunteers that he was certain not a single one of them would be absent at the roll-call.

The orders being now given and the place of meeting appointed, he went to take leave of Planchet, who asked the news about his army. D'Artagnan did not deem it necessary to acquaint him with the reduction in the rank and file of his forces; he feared such a disclosure might seriously impair his partner's confidence. Planchet rejoiced to learn that the army was levied, and that he, Planchet, was a sort of king on shares, who, from his throne-counter, subsidized a body of troops to make war on perfidious Albion, the enemy of all true French hearts.

Planchet, then, counted out to D'Artagnan twenty thousand livres in shining double-louis, Planchet's share of the capital invested, and another twenty thousand, also in shining double-louis, D'Artagnan's investment. D'Artagnan put each of the twenty thousands in a bag, and balancing them with his hands, said:

"This money is rather troublesome, my dear Planchet; are you aware that it weighs more than thirty pounds?"

"Bah! your horse will carry it as if it were a feather."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"Don't tell me, Planchet. A horse with a load of thirty pounds, in addition to the rider and his portmanteau, won't find it so easy to leap a river, or a wall, or a ditch, I assure you; and if the horse fail, so does the rider. Of course, you can't be expected to know this, as you served all your life in the infantry."

"Yes, but what are we to do, monsieur?" inquired Planchet, taken aback.

"Listen," said D'Artagnan; "I don't intend paying my army

until after we return. You keep my twenty thousand livres and use it in your business, in the meantime."

"And what about mine?"

"I take them with me."

"I feel honored by your confidence in me," said Planchet; "but suppose you do not return?"

"It's possible, though far from probable. So, to meet such a contingency, I'll make my will. Give me a pen, Planchet."

D'Artagnan took the pen and wrote, on an ordinary sheet of paper:

"*I, D'Artagnan, am possessed of twenty thousand livres, saved sou by sou during the thirty-three years I have been in the service of his Majesty the King of France. I bequeath five thousand to Athos, five thousand to Porthos, and five thousand to Aramis, on condition that they give these amounts, in my name and in theirs, to my young friend Raoul, Vicomte de Bragelonne. I bequeath the last five thousand to Planchet, that he may experience the less regret in distributing the other amounts among my friends.*

"*In faith of which I have signed these presents,*

"*D'Artagnan.*"

Planchet seemed very eager to learn what D'Artagnan had written.

"There," said the musketeer, "read."

At the last lines Planchet's eyes filled with tears.

"You believe I would n't have handed the money over without that? Then I don't want your five thousand livres."

D'Artagnan smiled.

"Accept, Planchet, accept. By doing so you lose only fifteen thousand livres instead of twenty, and at the same time become exempt from the temptation of refusing to know the signature of your master and your friend."

How well our dear D'Artagnan knew the hearts of men — and of grocers!

Those who have called Don Quixote a madman because he marched to the conquest of an empire without other aid than that of Sancho, his squire, and those who have called Sancho a madman because he marched with his master to the conquest of the said empire, would presumably have passed a similar sentence on D'Artagnan and Planchet.

And yet the first was reputed to have the keenest intellect

of any one at the court of France, and the second was justly regarded as one of the most long-headed merchants among the wholesale grocers of the Rue des Lombards, consequently among those of Paris, and consequently among those of France.

Now, if these two men are to be classed with other men, and the means they intended employing to restore a king to his throne are to be classed with other means, it would be natural for the most brainless witling that the most brainless country in the world ever produced to be disgusted with the lieutenant's foolhardiness and his partner's stupidity.

Luckily for D'Artagnan, he was not a man that paid attention to the twaddle uttered in his neighborhood, or to the criticisms passed on himself. He had adopted this device: "Do right and let people talk." Planchet, too, had adopted a device; it was this: "Take it easy and hold your tongue." It followed, then, that these two men, like all superior geniuses, were quite assured that they were right and all who did not think so were wrong.

D'Artagnan set out on his journey under the most favorable auspices. The weather could not have been more beautiful or the sky more unclouded. His mind was equally unclouded. He felt joyous and strong, calm and decided, unshakable in resolve and, therefore, permeated in a tenfold degree with that potent fluid which, forced from the nerves by the emotions of the soul, adds a force and productiveness to the human machine that will, in all probability, be accounted for more scientifically by future ages than it is by the present one. As in the times that were now no more, he passed again along the road, strewn with adventures, which had led him to Boulogne; he was traversing it for the fourth time. As he pushed forward, he could almost recognize the traces of his steps upon the pavement, the marks of his fist on the doors of the hostelries. His memory, ever active and retentive, recalled to life all his youth, a youth which neither his great heart nor his wrist of steel would now, after thirty years, discredit.

With what a rich nature was this man endowed! His passions, defects, weaknesses, were innumerable, but by a certain intellectual antithesis, innate in his soul, all these imperfections were changed into corresponding perfections. D'Artagnan, on account of the vivacity of his imagination, was afraid of a shadow, and, ashamed of his fear, he would march straight up to that shadow, and if it masked a real danger he would

show a reckless and extravagant audacity. Indeed, emotion dominated all his qualities, and this emotion was the source of all his enjoyment. He was very fond of the society of others, yet never tired of his own, and often a person who was fortunate enough to catch him alone would have seen him laugh at some jest he was relating to himself, or at some ludicrous fancies he invented for his own delectation; five minutes later he would be sunk in lassitude.

At present D'Artagnan was not, perhaps, as gay as he might have been had he been able to look forward to the chance of coming across some pleasant friends at Calais instead of the certainty of meeting his ten rascals in that city. However, his melancholy fits did not come near him more than once a day. Consequently he had only five visits from the gloomy deity when the sea at Boulogne burst upon his view, and these visits were short ones.

But once D'Artagnan was there, once he was near the field of action, every feeling except that of self-confidence vanished, vanished, never more to return. He followed the coast from Boulogne to Calais.

Calais was the place of general rendezvous; he had directed his volunteers to take up their quarters in the hostelry of the Grand-Monarque, where living was not too dear, where sailors cooked their own messes, and where swordsmen — swords with leather scabbards, it is needless to say — found board, lodging, and all the comforts of life for the sum of thirty sous per day.

D'Artagnan determined to take them unawares, and so try to judge at first sight whether he could depend on them as stanch comrades.

He reached Calais at half-past four in the evening.

CHAPTER XXII.

D'ARTAGNAN TRAVELS FOR THE HOUSE OF PLANCHET AND COMPANY.

The hostelry of the Grand-Monarque was situated in a little street parallel to the port, but was shut off from the port itself; a number of lanes intersected the two long straight lines of the port and the street, just as the rungs of a ladder

intersect the two sides. By these lanes passengers emerged from the port into the street, and by the same lanes found their way from the street to the port.

D'Artagnan rode to the port, entered one of the lanes, and came out unexpectedly in front of the hostelry of the Grand-Monarque.

The moment was well selected; it must have reminded D'Artagnan of his start in life at the hostelry of the Franc-Meunier at Meung. Some sailors who had been playing at dice were having words, and were uttering direful and mutual threats. The host, hostess, and the two waiters were watching uneasily these ill-conditioned gamblers, from whose midst a terrific war, waged with knives and axes, seemed on the point of bursting forth. But the game continued, notwithstanding.

A stone bench was occupied by two men who were apparently watching the door; eight other individuals sat at four tables in the common room at the back. Neither the men on the bench nor the men at the tables took any part in the quarrel or in the game. In these cool, indifferent spectators D'Artagnan recognized his ten men.

The dispute grew more bitter. Like the sea, every passion has its tide which ebbs and flows. A sailor, losing all self-control in his fury, overturned the table and the money that was on it. The table fell and the money rolled. At that very moment all the waiters and clerks of the hotel fell on the stakes, and a goodly number of silver coins were picked up by people, who beat a retreat while the sailors were falling foul of each other.

But the two men on the bench and the eight men at the tables, although seemingly strangers to one another, looked as if they had come to a secret understanding to remain perfectly impassive in the midst of these furious cries and this jingling of money. Two of them simply pushed away with their feet some of the combatants who were driven under their table.

Two others, to show their determination not to have anything to do with all this uproar, thrust their hands in their pockets; and two others mounted the table at which they were sitting as those do who are surprised by a rising of the waters and fear to be submerged.

"Upon my word," thought D'Artagnan, who had not lost a single one of the details just related, "I have got together a rather nice collection: prudent, calm, habituated to every sort

of racket and rioting; the devil's in it if I have been on the wrong scent this time!"

Suddenly his attention was directed to a certain part of the room.

The two men who had thrust aside the brawlers with their feet were assailed with abuse by the sailors, who had now made up their quarrel. One of the latter, half drunk with rage and entirely so with beer, was asking the smallest of the ten sages by what right he used his feet on God's creatures, who were n't dogs. And to emphasize the query he shook his big fist under the nose of one of M. d'Artagnan's recruits.

The man turned pale, whether from fear or anger it was hard to tell; the sailor, however, concluded it was from fear and raised his hand with the evident purpose of letting it fall on the head of the stranger. The latter, without apparently moving a muscle, struck out and gave the sailor such a punch in the stomach that he was sent rolling to the other end of the room, uttering frightful howls. Thereupon, all the sailor's comrades, naturally sympathizing with their conquered mate, fell upon his conqueror.

But, with the coolness which he had already evidenced, and without committing the imprudence of even touching his weapons, he seized a beer-mug with a pewter lid, and knocked down two or three of his assailants; then, when it was clear he must be overpowered by numbers, the seven other taciturn personages inside, who had not budged until now, apparently came to the conclusion that their own security was imperilled, and rushed to his assistance.

At the same time the two unconcerned spectators at the door turned round and knit their brows in a manner that plainly showed their resolution to attack the enemy in the rear, if he persevered in his aggression.

The host, waiters, and two night-watchmen who happened to be passing, and were drawn by curiosity into the room, were all involved in the scuffle and beaten black and blue.

Each of the Parisians hammered away like a Cyclops, and all acted with a uniformity and discipline delightful to behold. Obliged to give way in the end before numbers, they intrenched themselves behind the largest of the tables, while each of the two others seized a bench, and using it as a gigantic sledge, knocked down eight sailors with a sweep of their monstrous catapults.

When the floor was covered with the wounded and the hall was full of dust and uproar, D'Artagnan, satisfied with the ordeal to which his men had been subjected, advanced, sword in hand, tapping with the pommel such heads as were in his way, and shouted an energetic, "Hollo!" This put an end to the row at once. There was a general backing-out from the centre to the circumference, and D'Artagnan soon found himself alone, but triumphant.

"What is the matter?" he inquired, in the majestic tones wherewith Neptune uttered his "*Quos ego.*"

At that very moment even, at the mere sound of that voice, — to continue the Virgilian metaphor, — M. d'Artagnan's recruits, recognizing severally their sovereign lord, laid aside their anger as contentedly as they did their implements of resistance.

As for the sailors, too, when they saw the long, naked sword, martial air, and muscular arm of this fresh auxiliary of their enemies, a man evidently accustomed to command, they quietly picked up their wounded and their jugs.

The Parisians wiped their foreheads and bowed respectfully to their leader.

D'Artagnan was overwhelmed with thanks by the host of the Grand-Monarque. He received them with the air of a man who did not consider them above his deserts; then he declared his intention of strolling along the port while supper was getting ready. At once each of the recruits, considering this as a hint intended for himself personally, took up his hat, dusted his clothes, and followed D'Artagnan.

But D'Artagnan, though he took note of everything as he stalked along, never halted; he made his way straight to the downs, and the ten men, rather alarmed at tracking one another in this fashion and uneasy at seeing companions on the right and left with whom they were unacquainted, exchanged furious looks.

It was not until D'Artagnan, smiling at seeing them keep in the background, reached one of the deepest hollows in the downs that he turned round and addressed them, making a friendly gesture with his hand:

"I say, gentlemen, don't eat one another, please! You are bound to live together, pull together, be all in all to one another; so, really, you can't eat one another."

Then all hesitation vanished; the men breathed freely, as if they had been just dragged out of a tomb, and inspected each other with considerable complacency. After this inspection they turned their eyes on their chief, who, knowing from long experience the best method of dealing with men of their kind, improvised the following little speech, which he delivered with all his Gascon fire:

"Gentlemen, you know who I am. I have hired you because I was sure you were brave men, willing to take your share along with me in a glorious expedition. Try and realize the fact that, by working with me, you work for a king. I warn you, however, that if any of you lets a hint of this escape him, I shall be forced to knock him on the head immediately, in whatever fashion I judge most convenient. You are not unaware, gentlemen, that state secrets are like a deadly poison. So long as the poison is in a box and the box is locked, it does no harm; outside the box, it kills. Now come close to me, and I 'll tell you all of this secret I can."

All approached, moved by an impulse of curiosity.

"Come on," continued D'Artagnan, "come near me. I would not have the bird that hovers above our heads, nor the rabbit that sports among the sandhills, nor the fish that leaps out of the water hear us. Well, then, we are commissioned to discover and report to the superintendent of finance the extent of the injury English smugglers are inflicting on French merchants. I will go everywhere and see everything. We are poor fishermen from Picardy, driven on the coast by a tempest. It is unnecessary to tell you that we must sell fish, just as if we were genuine fishermen. Still, it 's possible our real character might be suspected and considerable annoyance to us be the consequence. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for us to be in a condition to defend ourselves. Now you see why I have chosen such clever and courageous fellows as you are. We are sure to have a gay time of it and not to run any great risk, either, for we have a powerful protector at our back, and he 'll insure us against any possible trouble. There 's just one thing that staggers me, though. It 's this: I must get together a crew of stupid fishermen, for the sake of appearances, and they 'll be a terrible trial to us, I can tell you; while, on the other hand, if there had happened to be among you some chaps who had smelt sea water — "

"Oh, don't let that bother you," said one of D'Artagnan's

recruits; "I was a prisoner among the pirates in Tunis for a full three years, and I can handle a boat like an admiral."

"You can?" cried D'Artagnan. "Well, we are in luck!"

D'Artagnan uttered these words with a hail-fellow-well-met accent that is simply indescribable, for D'Artagnan's marvellous intuition had already informed him that this piratical martyr was an ex-pirate himself, and he had engaged him with full knowledge of the fact. But D'Artagnan never said more than was necessary, judging it wise to leave people in doubt as to the extent of his discoveries. He was apparently perfectly satisfied with the rascal's explanation; the effect was satisfactory, he did not seem over-curious as to the cause.

"And," said a second, "I happen to have an uncle who is foreman of the laborers at the port of La Rochelle. I played about boats when I was but a child, and I defy the best Pontantais sailor going to manage an oar or a sail better than I can."

He was not a much greater liar than his comrade: he had rowed in one of his Majesty's galleys for six years at Ciotat.

Two others were more candid; they had been soldiers, and frankly confessed they had served on board ship as a punishment; they did not blush at the recollection. D'Artagnan, then, found himself the leader of ten warriors, four of whom were sailors; he commanded both a naval and a land force; if Planchet were aware of the fact, he would swell with pride.

All that was left D'Artagnan to do now was to give his general orders: he gave them with the utmost precision. He directed his men to be ready to set out for the Hague; some were to go by the road that leads to Breskens, others were to take the Antwerp route. After calculating the distance they could march in a day, he enjoined them to meet at the principal square in the Hague in a fortnight.

He advised them to proceed in couples, each selecting the companion he liked best. He himself picked out, among the least hang-dog-looking members of the party, two ex-guardsmen, whose only faults had been drunkenness and gambling. They had not lost all ideas of civilization, and, if they were decently clothed, it was possible their hearts might beat in normal fashion. D'Artagnan waited till the others had passed on, not caring to arouse their jealousy, kept his two favorites at his side, rigged them out from his own wardrobe, and started forward in their company.

He led these gentlemen to believe that he reposed the most absolute confidence in them; he made them a pretended revelation which was destined to add to the chances of the success of the expedition. He confessed his object was not to discover the damage inflicted on French commerce by English smuggling, but rather to find out a way of ruining English commerce by French smuggling. His companions seemed convinced, and, in fact, they really were. D'Artagnan was quite aware that, during their first debauch, when they were dead-drunk, one of the pair was sure to divulge this momentous secret to the whole band; his invention would infallibly have the desired result.

A fortnight after the incidents we have described as taking place at Calais, D'Artagnan's recruits met together at the Hague.

He perceived that they were already disguised as sailors, more or less ill-treated by the sea; it was a proof of their remarkable intelligence.

D'Artagnan sent them to sleep in a low ale-house in Newkerke street, and hired comfortable lodgings on the Grand Canal for himself.

He learned that the English monarch had returned to the dominions of William II. of Nassau, Stadtholder of Holland. He learned also that, owing to the refusal of King Louis XIV., the Stadtholder's reception of him had been rather cool, and he was now living in a little house in Scheveningen, a sea-coast village on the downs, a few miles from the Hague.

There, it was said, the unhappy exile found consolation in gazing out sadly, with that sadness so characteristic of the princes of his race, on the immense northern sea which separated him from his England, as it had once separated Mary Stuart from France. There, behind the trees of the beautiful Scheveningen park, on the fine sand upon which grows the golden heath of the downs, Charles II. vegetated like that heath, but more lonely and unfortunate, for he lived and thought, hoped and despaired by turns.

D'Artagnan pushed on as far as Scheveningen to find out for certain whether the tales he heard of the prince were true, and he was able to see Charles II. himself, Charles II. coming out of a little door that opened on the wood for a melancholy stroll along the beach in the sunset, not even attracting the attention of the fishermen, who, on their return in the evening,

dragged up their craft on the dry beach, like the ancient mariners of the Grecian isles.

D'Artagnan recognized the King. He beheld his dark eyes riveted on the boundless extent of the waters and his pale face lit up by the blood-red rays of a sun that was already half-sunk beneath the black line of the horizon. Then Charles II. sauntered back slowly and sadly to his isolated abode, solitary, amusing himself with making the crumbling and shifting sand creak under his feet.

On that very evening D'Artagnan hired for a thousand livres a fisherman's bark, valued at four thousand; the balance of three thousand, to be paid afterward, was placed in the hands of the burgomaster. Then, unobserved, during the darkest part of the night, he embarked the six men forming his land army, and, with the rising tide, gained the offing at three in the morning, managing the boat ostensibly with the aid of his four recruits, but really relying as confidently on his galley-slave as he would have done on the first pilot belonging to the port.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR, IN SPITE OF HIMSELF, HAS TO RELATE A LITTLE HISTORY.

While kings and men were busying themselves about England in this fashion, and while England was governing herself without help from others, — it must be said to her praise that never before had she been so badly governed, — a man upon whom God had fixed his eye and laid his fingers, a man predestined to write his name in shining letters on history's page, was pursuing, in the face of the world, a work full of mystery and audacity. He was moving forward, but whither no one knew, although not only England but France and all Europe were gazing on him as he marched with firm step and head erect. All that was known of this man we are about to tell.

Monk had just declared in favor of the liberty of the Rump Parliament, as it was called, a parliament which General Lambert, in imitation of Cromwell, whose lieutenant he had been, had of late blockaded so closely, to force it to do his will,

that not a single member had been able to get out, and only one, Peter Wentworth, to get in, during the entire blockade.

Everything centred in two men, Lambert and Monk, the one representing military despotism, the other pure republicanism. These two men were the sole political representatives of that revolution in which Charles I. had first lost his crown and then his head.

For that matter, Lambert did not hide his intentions; he wanted to establish an exclusively military government, with himself at its head.

Monk, an austere republican, according to some, desired to maintain the Rump Parliament, a visible although degenerate personification of the republic. According to others, Monk was an adroit and ambitious schemer, and wished quite simply to turn the parliament he feigned to protect into a solid stepping-stone to that throne which Cromwell had now left free, and upon which he had never ventured himself to take his seat.

Thus Monk and Lambert had proclaimed themselves mutual enemies, the former by persecuting the parliament, the latter by taking its side.

Consequently, the first thing each of them thought of was to raise an army: Monk in Scotland, a land of Presbyterians and royalists, or in other words, of malcontents; Lambert in London, always in opposition to the power it had immediately before its eyes.

Monk had pacified Scotland, had collected an army in it, and had regarded it as a secure retreat; the army was the safeguard of the country and the country of the army. Monk knew that the day appointed by the Lord for a great change had not yet arrived; apparently, therefore, his sword was nailed to the scabbard. Unassailable in this savage, mountainous Scotland of his, absolute as a general, king of an army of eleven thousand veterans, whom he had often led to victory, better informed as to the affairs of London than Lambert, who had a garrison in the city, — such was Monk's situation when, at a distance of three hundred miles from the capital, he declared for the parliament. On the other hand, Lambert, as we have said, was in the capital itself; it was the centre of all his operations; there he was surrounded by all his friends as well as by the dregs of the populace, ever lavish of their affections to the enemies of constituted authority.

It was in London, then, that Lambert learned of the support Monk was bringing the parliament from the frontiers of Scotland. He decided that no time was to be lost; the Tweed was not so far from the Thames that an army could not cross from one river to the other, especially if well commanded. He was, moreover, fully aware that according as Monk advanced farther into England his soldiers would form on the road that snowball — an emblem of the terrestrial globe of fortune — which in such cases ever grows larger for the ambitious man until it ultimately becomes the prop that helps him to his aim. He gathered his army together, then, an army as formidable on account of its character as of its number, and marched to encounter Monk, who, like a prudent navigator sailing among rocks, advanced very slowly, his nose to the wind, scenting every blast and listening for every sound that came from London.

The two armies got a glimpse of each other near Newcastle. Lambert, who was the first to arrive, encamped in the city itself.

Monk, always on his guard, halted where he was, and went into quarters at Coldstream, on the Tweed.

The sight of Lambert delighted Monk's army, while, on the contrary, the sight of Monk threw Lambert's into disorder. It looked as if these valorous fire-eaters, who had made such noise in the streets of London, had set out on their expedition in the hope of meeting nobody, while now that they had met an army, and that this army hoisted before them, not only a flag, but a cause, a principle, — it looked, we repeat, as if these valorous fire-eaters had begun to reflect that they were not as good republicans as the soldiers of Monk, since the latter defended the parliament, and Lambert defended nothing, not even himself.

As for Monk, if he reflected at all, his reflections must have been very melancholy, for history relates — and we know that chaste damsel never lies — that on the day of his arrival in Coldstream not a single sheep could be found in the entire town.

If the army Monk commanded had been made up of Englishmen, every mother's son of them would have deserted on the spot. But the Scotch are unlike the English, to whom the fluid flesh we call blood is an absolute necessity. The Scotch, a poor and sober race, live on a little barley, crushed between

two stones, diluted with spring water, and cooked on a heated sandstone. The Scotchmen, then, when the barley was distributed among them, were not much concerned about the absence of meat in Coldstream.

But Monk's acquaintance with barley cakes was limited; he was hungry, and his staff, as hungry as himself, to say the least, looked anxiously in every direction for the materials of their supper. Monk ordered a perquisition; but his scouts found the town deserted and the larders empty; no chance of discovering a butcher or a baker in Coldstream. Not even a slice of bread could be found for the general's table. When report after report had come in, one more distressing than the other, Monk, seeing terror and despair on every countenance, declared he was not hungry; besides, there would be something to eat the next day; Lambert probably intended to give battle; consequently, he must surrender his provisions if he was driven back into Newcastle, or, if he were conqueror, he would forever release Monk's soldiers from the pangs of hunger.

This consolation produced no effect except on a very small number. Monk, however, was not disturbed, for under an air of the most perfect gentleness Monk was an inflexible disciplinarian.

Every one, then, was satisfied, or at least appeared to be so. Monk, whose craving for food was quite as intense as that of his soldiers, affected the utmost indifference as to the absent sheep. He cut a strip of tobacco about half an inch long from a roll belonging to a sergeant in his suite and set to masticating the said fragment, assuring his lieutenants that hunger was a delusion, and that, in any case, no one was ever hungry so long as he had anything to put between his teeth.

This jest was satisfactory to some of those who were not at all impressed by the conclusion which Monk had deduced from Lambert's neighborhood; the number of grumblers was, therefore, sensibly diminished, guards were posted, patrols sent on their rounds, and the general went on with his frugal repast under his open tent.

Between his camp and that of the enemy arose an ancient abbey, then standing, but now in ruins. It was called Newcastle Abbey, and was built between the plain and the river on an extensive piece of ground, which was almost a marsh, fed by numerous springs as well as by the rains. However, in the midst

of pools covered with reeds and rushes, it was still possible to see patches of solid earth that had once formed portions of the kitchen-garden, park, pleasure-garden, and other appurtenances of the abbey, which resembled one of those sea spiders with round body, but with claws that branch out in every direction.

The kitchen-garden, one of the most elongated claws of the abbey, extended as far as the camp of Monk. Unfortunately, it was now early in June, and the kitchen-garden, long since abandoned, offered few resources.

Monk had ordered this place to be guarded, as it could have been very easily surprised. The fires of the hostile camp could be plainly discerned beyond the abbey. But between these fires and the abbey lay the Tweed, rolling its luminous waters under the shadows of some tall and verdant oaks.

Monk was well acquainted with the position of the enemy, having often made Newcastle and its outskirts his headquarters. He knew that, while during the daytime Lambert might send scouts among these ruins and even try to have a brush with his outposts, he would take good care not to do so at night. He felt, therefore, in perfect security.

Consequently, his soldiers saw him, after what he pompously called his supper, — in other words, after the mastication related at the beginning of this chapter, — sleeping, like Napoleon on the eve of Austerlitz, in his rush-bottomed chair, half under the glare of a lamp, half under the reflection of the moon, which was now beginning to climb the heavens.

And that meant that it was now nearly half-past nine.

Suddenly Monk was aroused from his light, perhaps feigned, slumbers by a band of soldiers, who came running up and shouting joyously. They kicked at the poles of the tent, making a sort of buzzing noise to awake him.

There was not the slightest necessity for such uproar. The general opened his eyes at once.

"Well, my lads, what's the matter?" he inquired.

"General," answered several voices, "you'll have your supper."

"I had it," was Monk's quiet answer, "and was digesting it calmly, as you see. But come in and tell me why you are here."

"Good news, general!"

"Eh? does Lambert say he will fight to-morrow?"

"No, but we have just captured a fishing-boat, which was bringing fish to Newcastle."

"And you did wrong, my friends; these London gentry are dainty, and they like to have a first course at dinner. You will be the cause of considerable annoyance to them to-night, and they will be merciless in your regard, both to-night and to-morrow. I think it would show good taste on our part, I assure you, to send General Lambert his fish and his fishermen unless —"

The general reflected a moment.

"Say," said he, "who are those fishermen, if you please?"

"Picardy seamen, who were fishing on the coasts of France or Holland, and who were driven ashore by a storm."

"Do any of them speak our language?"

"The leader spoke a few words of English."

The general's suspicion was still further excited by this new information.

"Very well," said he, "I wish to see these men; bring them to me."

An officer went immediately in search of them.

"What is their number," asked the general, "and what kind of a vessel have they?"

"There are ten or twelve of them, general, and their boat is a sort of *chasse-marée*, as they call it, built, I should imagine, in Holland."

"And you say they were carrying fish to General Lambert's camp?"

"Yes, general; and it looks as if their fishing had turned out well, too."

"Well, we 'll see as to that," answered Monk.

Indeed, at this very moment the officer returned with the leader of the fishermen, a well-preserved man about fifty or fifty-five years old. He was of middle height, and wore a coarse woolen jerkin, with a cap that came down to his eyes. A cutlass hung from his belt, and he walked with that uncertain gait peculiar to sailors, who, owing to the motion of their boat, never know whether they are planting a foot on a plank or on nothing, and, consequently, step with as much force as if they were driving in a pile.

Monk took a long look at the fisherman, with his keen, penetrating eyes; the fisherman smiled back at him, with the smile, half mocking, half stupid, peculiar to French peasants.

"You speak English?" asked the general, in excellent French.

"A little, my lord, very little," replied the fisherman.

These words were spoken with the quick, jerky accent of the people beyond the Loire rather than in the somewhat drawling tones of the natives of the west and northwest of France.

"Still, after all, you speak it?" persisted Monk, desirous of hearing this accent a second time, and studying it.

"Oh, we seafaring folk," answered the fisherman, "talk a little of every language."

"Then you are a fisherman-sailor?"

"At present, yes, my lord, and not a bad one, either, though I say it as should n't. I have caught a barbel that weighs at least thirty pounds, and more than fifty mullets; I have also a lot of whitings that will make a delicious fry."

"I rather fancy you have done more fishing in the Gulf of Gascony than in the Channel," said Monk, with a smile.

"Yes, I 'm from the south; but that 's no reason why I should not be a good fisherman, my lord."

"Not at all, and I will buy your fish; now tell me frankly for whom you intended them."

"My lord, I will make a clean breast of it: I was going to Newcastle, hugging the coast, when a troop of cavalry, coming from the opposite direction, signalled to my vessel to turn back to your honor's camp, or they would fire on me. As I was not armed for fighting," added the fisherman, smiling, "there was nothing for it but to obey."

"And why were you going to Lambert's camp instead of mine?"

"My lord, I 'll be open with you — your lordship won't be offended?"

"By no means; on the contrary, I order you to tell me everything."

"Well, my lord, I was going to Lambert, because these city gentlemen pay well, while you Scotchmen — Puritans, Presbyterians, Covenanters, as you call yourselves — eat little and don't pay at all."

Monk shrugged his shoulders, but did not try to hide a smile.

"And how does it come to pass that you, a native of the south of France, are fishing on our coasts?"

"Because I was such an idiot as to get married in Picardy."

"Indeed? Still, Picardy is n't England, is it?"

"My lord, man launches a boat on the sea, but God and the wind do the rest, and drive it where it pleases them."

"So you did not intend landing here?"

"Never."

"And in what direction were you sailing?"

"We were just returning from Ostend, after coming across a school of mackerel, when a violent south wind drove us off the shore; then, seeing resistance was useless, we scudded before it. The only chance of not losing the result of our fishing, which had been very good, was to sell our freight in the nearest English port; now, the nearest port was Newcastle. We could n't have a better opportunity, we were told; both camp and city were crowded with people, crowded with English gentlemen who were as hungry as they were wealthy, we were also told; then I headed for Newcastle."

"And where are your companions?"

"Oh, they are on board; they are common, ignorant sailors, anyway."

"While you —"

"Oh, as for myself," answered the skipper, laughing, "I saw a good deal of the world with my father, and I know the name and value of every coin, gold, silver, and copper, in every tongue in Europe; so my crew listen to me as if I were an oracle and obey me as if I were an admiral."

"Then it was you that selected General Lambert as likely to be your best customer?"

"Undoubtedly. And honestly, my lord, was I wrong?"

"You 'll see that later."

"In any case, my lord, if there be any one to blame it is myself. I hope my comrades won't suffer on my account."

"A clever rogue, this fellow, beyond any doubt," thought Monk.

Then after a few minutes' silence spent in inspecting the fisherman:

"You say you come from Ostend?" he asked.

"Yes, straight from Ostend, my lord."

"You must have heard people discuss the events of the day, then, for I have no doubt they are a subject of great interest in France and Holland. What is the person who calls himself King of England doing at present?"

"Oh, my lord," cried the fisherman, with blunt, downright simplicity, "that's a lucky question, and could never have come to a better market for an answer. Just fancy, my lord; after we put into Ostend to sell a few mackerel we had on board, I saw the ex-King walking on the downs; he was waiting for his horses which were to carry him to the Hague; he is tall and pale, with black hair and features that are rather harsh. He does not seem to be in good health, however, and the air of Holland is evidently not good for him."

Monk followed attentively the energetic, picturesque, and somewhat rambling reply of the fisherman, delivered in what was to the general a foreign tongue; fortunately, as we have said, he spoke it with great fluency. The fisherman, on his side, used now an English word, now a French one, and again a word belonging to neither language, a Gascon word, in fact. Happily, his eyes spoke for him and so eloquently that, however halting might be the words on the lips, there could be no doubt as to the meaning of the words in the eyes. The general seemed more and more satisfied with his examination.

"You must have heard that this ex-King had some object or other in going to the Hague."

"Oh, yes, I certainly have," answered the fisherman.

"And what was it?"

"Always the same. Has he not his mind set on returning to England?"

"True," said Monk, thoughtfully.

"And, besides, he reckons that the Stadtholder — you know, my lord, William II.?"

"Well?"

"Will aid him to the full extent of his power."

"Ah, you heard that, did you?"

"No, but I believe it."

"Why, you are quite a politician, are you not?" asked Monk.

"Oh, my lord, we old sea-dogs are familiar with wind and water, the two most fickle things in creation; it is n't strange we should be pretty sure as to other matters also."

"Well," said Monk, changing the conversation, "I have been told you are going to feed us well, at any rate."

"I will do my best, my lord."

"What do you charge for your fish."

"Not such a fool as to fix a price, my lord."

"Why?"

"Because the fish is really yours."

"By what right?"

"The right of the strongest."

"But, for all that, I intend to pay you."

"You are very generous, my lord."

"And their full value, too."

"I don't ask that."

"What do you ask, then?"

"Leave to depart."

"Where? To go to General Lambert?"

"Why should I go to Newcastle when I no longer have any fish?"

"At all events, listen to me."

"I listen."

"I want to give you a piece of advice."

"Eh! your lordship is going to pay me and give me good advice into the bargain; why, my lord, your kindness overwhelms me!"

Monk looked at the fisherman more intently than ever; he seemed to have still some lingering suspicions of him.

"Yes," said he, "I am going to pay you and give you good advice into the bargain, for the payment and advice are closely connected. If, then, you go to General Lambert —"

The fisherman made a gesture with his head and shoulders that meant:

"I must n't oppose him, if he 's stubborn."

"Do not cross the marsh," continued Monk, "you 'll have money about you, and I have posted a number of Scotchmen in ambush there. They are not people very easy to get along with; I am afraid they would hardly understand the language you speak, although it seems to be made up of three languages; they would, very likely, steal what I gave you, and when you went back to your own country you would say General Monk has two hands, a Scotch and an English one, and that what he gives with the English hand he takes back with the Scotch."

"Oh, general, I 'll go where you like, take my word for that," said the fisherman, with a timidity too expressive not to be exaggerated. "I ask nothing better than to stay here, if you wish it."

"I am quite sure you're speaking the truth," answered the general, with an imperceptible smile; "still, I cannot very well keep you in my tent."

"I'm not so self-conceited as to expect it, my lord; all I ask of your lordship is to point me out some place where I can remain to-night; that need not embarrass you; a night is soon passed."

"Then I will give orders to have you conducted to your vessel."

"Just as your lordship pleases. Only if you should send a carpenter along with me, you would have my sincere gratitude."

"Why should I do so?"

"Because your soldiers, when they dragged my boat back up the river, by means of a cable pulled by their horses, battered it somewhat against the rocks on the shore, so that there are at least two feet of water in the hold, my lord."

"The better reason why you should see to your boat, in my opinion."

"My lord, I am, of course, at your orders," said the fisherman. "I will empty my creels where you like, then you can pay me, if you are pleased to do so, and dismiss me if you think it the right thing to do. You see, my lord, it's easy dealing with me."

"Well, I am inclined to believe you are an honest fellow," said Monk, whose piercing gaze could not discover anything in the candid eyes of the fisherman to confirm his first suspicions. "Ho, there, Digby!"

An aide-de-camp appeared.

"Conduct this worthy fellow and his comrades to the tents near the canteens, opposite the marshes, so that they will be near their boat, yet need not sleep on board to-night. What is the matter, Spithead?"

Spithead was the sergeant from whom Monk had borrowed a piece of tobacco for his supper.

He had entered the general's tent without being summoned, and the general's query was a natural one.

"My lord," said he, "a French gentleman has presented himself at the outposts and asks to speak to you."

It is unnecessary to say that these words were spoken in English. However, although the conversation was in English, the fisherman gave a slight start, which Monk, taken up with his sergeant, did not notice.

"And who is this gentleman?" he inquired.

"My lord," replied Spithead, "he told me his name, but those confounded French names are so hard for a Scotch tongue that I could not get a grip of it. But, from what I heard from the guards, he is the same gentleman who came to wait on you yesterday when the army halted, and whom you refused to receive."

"Yes, I was then holding a council of my officers."

"What are your lordship's orders with respect to this gentleman?"

"Bring him hither."

"Shall we take any precautions?"

"What precautions?"

"Bandaging his eyes, for example?"

"What would be the use? He can see only what I wish him to see — eleven thousand valiant soldiers ready to have their throats cut in defence of the parliament of England and Scotland."

"And this man, my lord?" said Spithead, pointing to the fisherman, who during the entire conversation stood motionless and impassive, like a man who sees but does not comprehend.

"Ah, yes," said Monk.

Then, turning to the fisherman:

"You can now leave, my good fellow," said he; "I have found a lodging for you. Digby, take him with you. You need not be uneasy, your money will be sent after you immediately."

"Thank you, my lord," said the fisherman.

He lighted upon his companions about a hundred yards from the tent. They were whispering together with a volubility that did not conceal a certain amount of anxiety; but when he made them a reassuring sign, they were quiet.

"Hollo! you fellows, come here," shouted the skipper; "his lordship General Monk has been so kind as to pay us for our fish and to give us lodging for to-night also."

The fishermen surrounded their leader, and under the guidance of Digby the little band made their way to the canteens, which, it will be recollected, were assigned to them as their quarters.

As they went on in the dark, they passed close to the guards who were conducting the French gentleman to General Monk.

This gentleman was on horseback and muffled up in a big

cloak, so that, however great the skipper's curiosity, he was unable to gratify it. As for the gentleman himself, he was quite unconscious of being in touch with a band of his countrymen, and so moved on without paying the slightest attention to them.

The aide-de-camp installed his guests in a rather clean tent, from which he dislodged an Irish canteen woman, who went away to sleep where she could with her six children. A huge fire was burning in front, its light reflected on the grassy pools of the marsh, now wrinkled by a cool breeze. As soon as the sailors were settled, the aide-de-camp wished them good-night, at the same time showing them that they could see from their tent the masts of their boat, which was rocking gently on the Tweed, a proof that, so far, it had not sunk to the bottom. The sight appeared to give infinite satisfaction to the leader of the fishermen.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TREASURE.

The French gentleman whose arrival had been announced to Monk by Spithead, and who had passed, muffled up in his cloak, so close to the fisherman that had left the general's tent five minutes before the stranger entered it — the French gentleman, we say, went by the different posts without even glancing at any of them, evidently afraid of seeming inquisitive. He was, in obedience to the orders given, conducted to the general's tent. He was left alone in the anteroom in front of it to await the appearance of Monk, who delayed only long enough to listen to the report of his men and to examine through a canvas partition the features of the person soliciting an interview with him.

Doubtless the report of those who had escorted the French gentleman dwelt on the discretion with which he had behaved, for the stranger's first impression of the reception accorded him by the general was that it was very favorable, far more so than he could have expected at such a time and from one so distrustful. Still, when Monk confronted the stranger, he fastened on him his piercing eyes, according to his custom. The stranger sustained his gaze calmly, neither embarrassed

nor anxious. After a few seconds the general made a gesture with his hand and with his head, to indicate he was waiting for him to speak.

"My lord," said the gentleman, in excellent English, "I have sought an interview with you on a matter of great importance."

"Monsieur," answered Monk, in French, "for a gentleman belonging to the continent you speak our language with great purity. I must beg you to excuse me, — for my question may appear somewhat indiscreet, — but do you speak French with equal purity?"

"There is nothing surprising, my lord, in my familiarity with English. I lived in England in my youth, and was here twice afterward."

These words were spoken in French, and with a purity of accent that showed the speaker was not only a true Frenchman, but a Frenchman from the neighborhood of Tours.

"And in what part of England did you live, monsieur?"

"In my youth in London, my lord; afterward, in 1635, I went on a pleasure tour to Scotland; and, finally, in 1648, I resided for some time in Newcastle, most of the time in the convent, the gardens of which are now occupied by your army."

"Pardon me, monsieur, but you understand it is my duty to ask these questions, do you not?"

"It would surprise me if you did not ask them, my lord."

"And now, monsieur, what can I do for you? what do you require of me?"

"This, my lord, — but are we alone?"

"Entirely alone, monsieur, except, of course, for the post that guards us."

So saying, Monk pushed apart the hangings of the tent with his hand, and pointed to a sentry, who at the first call could have summoned assistance in a second.

"In that case, my lord," said the gentleman, as calmly as if he and the person he addressed had long been intimate friends, "I am firmly resolved to tell you everything, for I know you are an honorable man. And, indeed, the very communication I am about to make will of itself prove the high esteem in which I hold you."

Monk, astonished at a language that at once placed himself and this French gentleman on a footing of perfect equality, to

say the very least, raised his penetrating eyes to the stranger's face, and with an irony that the inflection of his voice alone rendered perceptible, for not a muscle of his face moved, he said:

"Thank you, monsieur; but, in the first place, pray tell me who you are."

"I have already given my name to your sergeant, my lord."

"Excuse me, monsieur; he is a Scotchman and was not able to remember it."

"I am called the Comte de la Fère," said Athos, bowing.

"The Comte de la Fère?" asked Monk, trying if he could call the name to mind. "Excuse me, monsieur, but I think this is the first time I ever heard the title. Do you fill any office at court?"

"No, my lord, I am a private gentleman."

"But you must have been the recipient of some dignities?"

"King Charles I. made me a Knight of the Garter, and Queen Anne of Austria bestowed on me the ribbon of the Holy Ghost, my lord."

"The Garter! the Holy Ghost! You are a knight of both orders, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And on what occasion have such favors been granted you?"

"They were granted for services rendered to their Majesties."

Monk stared in astonishment at this man, apparently so simple and yet so great; then, as if he despaired of solving the mystery of such simplicity and greatness, with regard to which, moreover, the stranger did not seem inclined to volunteer further information, he said:

"So you were the gentleman that presented himself at the outposts yesterday?"

"And who was sent away from them; yes, my lord."

"Many officers do not allow any one to enter their camp, especially on the eve of a probable battle; but I differ from my colleagues, and like to turn everything to account. I find some utility in all sorts of advice, and as for danger, all danger is sent me by God, and I weigh it in my hand with all the energy he has given me. The only reason why I did not receive you yesterday was that I was holding a council. I am free to-day; speak."

"My lord, you have acted with entire prudence in receiving me, for I am not concerned about the battle you are to fight with General Lambert, nor about your camp, either, and a proof of this is that I turned away my head to avoid seeing your soldiers and shut my eyes to avoid counting your tents. No, my lord, I have come to speak to you solely on my own account."

"Well, speak, monsieur," said Monk.

"A moment ago I had the honor of informing your lordship," continued Athos, "that I lived for a long time in Newcastle; it was at the time when the Scotch betrayed the late King to Cromwell."

"I know," said Monk, coldly.

"At that period I had a very large sum in gold, and, on the eve of the battle, having perhaps a kind of presentiment of what was to happen on the next day, I hid it in the principal cellar in Newcastle convent, in the tower the top of which, silvered by the moon, you can see from here. There is where my treasure is buried, and I have come to entreat your lordship to permit me to remove it before a mine or other warlike engine, if the battle turn in that direction, destroy the building, and either scatter my gold or reveal its hiding-place to the soldiers, who would seize it, of course."

Monk was a keen observer of men; on the features of the man before him he beheld the stamp of the highest energy, prudence, and wisdom. He could, therefore, attribute this revelation of the French gentleman to his high-minded confidence in himself, and he showed that he was deeply affected by it.

"Monsieur," said he, "your trust in me is not misplaced. But is this sum worth the trouble you are likely to encounter? Are you even sure that it is where you left it?"

"It is, my lord; I have not the slightest doubt on that point."

"You have answered one question; now for the other — I asked was the sum large enough to justify your trouble in searching for it."

"It is, in truth, a very large sum, for there is a million, which I concealed in two barrels."

"A million!" exclaimed Monk, now, in turn, the object of a prolonged and earnest scrutiny on the part of Athos.

Monk perceived this, and became again distrustful.

"This man," he thought, "is laying a snare for me. So, monsieur," said he, aloud, "you want to remove this money, as I understand?"

"With your permission, my lord."

"To-day?"

"To-night even, and on account of the circumstances I have explained."

"But, monsieur," objected Monk, "General Lambert is as close to the abbey in which you are so much interested as I am; why did you not appeal to him?"

"Because, my lord, in matters of critical importance we should always place the utmost reliance on our instincts. Now I do not feel the same confidence in General Lambert that I do in you."

"Very well, monsieur, I will help you to find your money, if it be still there, for it may not be, after all. Twelve years have elapsed since 1648, and many events have occurred during that period."

Monk dwelt on this point to see if the French gentleman would seize on it as a means of escape from an unpleasant predicament; but Athos never winced.

"I assure you, my lord," he said, firmly, "that I am absolutely certain these two barrels have changed neither place nor owner."

This response banished one suspicion from Monk's mind, but suggested another.

Perhaps this Frenchman was some emissary sent to decoy the protector of the parliament into the commission of a breach of his duty; in that case the gold would be simply a bait, and possibly it was hoped, by means of this bait, to excite his cupidity. Surely this gold had no existence. It ought to be his policy, therefore, to catch this French gentleman in the very act of his falsehood and trickery, and to turn the very snare in which his enemies were trying to entrap him into the agent of his triumph and his glory. Monk, as soon as he had decided on his course, said to Athos:

"Monsieur, will you do me the honor to share my supper with me to-night?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Athos, with a bow, "for I feel that the sympathy which attracts me toward you renders me worthy of the honor you do me."

"Your frank acceptance of my invitation is the more gra-

cious on your part because I have very few cooks, — very untrained they are too, — and because my purveyors returned this evening empty handed. Indeed, but for a fisherman of your nation, who blundered into our camp, General Monk would have gone supperless to bed. I can offer you, then, some fresh fish, or fish the vender says is fresh."

"My lord, all I care about is to have the honor of spending a few moments more in your company."

After this interchange of compliments, during which Monk was as observant as ever, the supper, or what had to make up for it, was served on a deal table. Monk requested the Comte de la Fère to be seated, and then took a chair opposite him. A single dish filled with boiled fish was all the fare offered to these distinguished gentlemen; it was better calculated to please a hungry stomach than to gratify a dainty palate.

During their supper — if a boiled fish washed down with bad ale could be called a supper — Monk prevailed on the count to relate the last events of the Fronde, the particulars of M. de Condé's reconciliation with the King, and the circumstances that rendered the latter's marriage with the Infanta Maria Teresa probable. But like Athos himself, he avoided all allusions to the political interests that at the present moment united, or rather divided, England, France, and Holland.

This conversation had the effect of finally convincing Monk of a fact which he had already noted at the first words exchanged between them, namely, that his guest was a personage of high distinction. He could not be an assassin, and Monk shrank from believing him a spy, but there was so much astuteness as well as resoluteness in Athos that the English general was inclined to fancy he might be a conspirator.

When they rose from table:

"You really believe in your treasure, then, monsieur?" inquired Monk.

"Yes, my lord."

"Really and truly?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"And you think you'll recognize the place where it was buried?"

"At the first glance."

"Well, monsieur, you have aroused my curiosity, and I will accompany you; besides, it is necessary for me to do so, as you

would find great difficulty in passing through the camp without me or one of my lieutenants."

"General, I could not think of allowing you to inconvenience yourself unless I had actual need of your company. But as I see clearly that your company on the present occasion is not only an honor but a prerequisite to success, I accept it."

"Do you think we ought to take some people with us?" asked Monk.

"I believe it is useless, general, unless, of course, you consider it necessary yourself. Two men and a horse are all that is required for the removal of the two barrels to the felucca which brought me hither."

"But you will be obliged to dig, excavate, throw up earth, split stones — surely you do not intend to do that sort of work yourself?"

"General, there is no digging, no excavating; the treasure is concealed in one of the burial vaults of the convent; you simply lift a slab in which is fixed a big iron ring, and a little staircase, consisting of four steps, is laid bare. The two barrels are at the bottom, side by side, covered with a coat of plaster, and not unlike the other coffins. There is, besides, an inscription which would enable me to recognize the slab in any case, and as I do not wish, in a matter involving so much trustfulness and delicacy, to hide any of my secrets from your lordship, this is the inscription:

"*Hic jacet venerabilis Petrus Guillelmus Scott, Canon. Honorab. Conventûs Novi Castelli. Obiit quartâ et decimâ die. Feb. ann. Dom.*, MCCVIII. *Requiescat in pace.*"

Monk did not lose a word. He did not know whether to be astonished at the marvellous duplicity of this man and the consummate skill with which he played his part, or considering the circumstances in which his request was preferred, at his loyal confidence in staking a million against the stab of a poniard, in the midst of an army that would have considered the theft of that million as a restitution.

"Agreed, then," said he, "and as the adventure strikes me as out of the common, I will carry the torch myself."

Whereupon he buckled on a short sword and stuck a dagger in his belt; in doing so he slightly opened his doublet, revealing the delicate links of a coat of mail beneath, intended, no

doubt, to protect him from the first thrust of an assassin's dagger.

Then taking a Scotch dirk in his left hand he turned to Athos, saying,

"Are you ready, monsieur? I am."

The action of Athos, on the other hand, was the very reverse of that of Monk. He laid his poniard on the table, unfastened his belt and placed it and his sword beside the poniard, and unhooking his doublet, as if to take out his handkerchief, he disclosed, under his fine cambric shirt, his bare breast, unprotected by arms either offensive or defensive.

"In truth, a strange man!" mused Monk; "he has no weapon whatever — Hah! what if he had men in ambush somewhere out yonder!"

"General," said Athos, as if he had divined his suspicions, "you wish us to go alone, and no doubt we should be perfectly safe; still, a great captain ought never to expose himself rashly to danger; it is night and the crossing of the marshes may be attended with some peril — should you not take some of your soldiers with you?"

"You are right," said Monk. "Digby!" he called.

The aide-de-camp appeared.

"Fifty men with sword and musket," he added.

And he turned his eyes on Athos.

"Too few," said the count, "if there is danger; too many if there is none."

"I will go alone," answered Monk. "Digby, I want nobody. Come on, monsieur."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MARSH.

On their way from the camp to the Tweed, Athos and Monk crossed the ground which Digby and the fishermen had crossed on their way from the Tweed to the camp. The appearance of the place, and the changes brought about in it by men, was calculated to affect strongly a vivid and refined imagination like that of Athos. The entire attention of Athos was taken up with the desolation before him; the entire

attention of Monk was taken up with Athos, whose eyes were now raised to heaven, now lowered to earth, — Athos so heedful, pensive, and melancholy.

Digby, somewhat disturbed by the general's last order, and especially by the tone in which it was delivered, followed these nocturnal promenaders for about twenty yards. But Monk turned round, seemingly surprised at his orders not being obeyed, and the aide-de-camp, becoming aware of his indiscretion, retired to his tent.

He supposed the general desired to make a careful inspection of the camp, incognito, one of those inspections an experienced captain never fails to make on the eve of a decisive engagement. He accounted for the presence of Athos in the manner in which an inferior accounts for whatever is mysterious in the conduct of his leader: Athos was, probably, nay, in Digby's eyes certainly, a spy, the bearer of useful information for his commander.

After a walk of ten minutes among the tents and posts, which were closer together near headquarters, Monk turned into a narrow causeway which branched out into three paths. The one on the left led to the river; the one in the centre to Newcastle Abbey on the marsh; and the one on the right to the first lines of Monk's camp; in other words, the lines nearest Lambert's army. Beyond the river was stationed an outpost belonging to Monk's army, which kept a watch on the enemy; it consisted of a hundred and fifty Scotchmen. They had swum across the Tweed after sounding an alarm; but as there was no bridge at this spot, and as Lambert's soldiers did not take as readily to the water as those of Monk, the latter was apparently not very anxious about the situation in this quarter.

The fishermen were lodged on the Scotch side of the river, about five hundred yards from the abbey, amid a swarm of little tents erected by the neighboring clansmen, who had their wives and children with them.

This confused jumble of tents and huts when lit up by the moon presented a striking picture. The faint shadows softened and ennobled every squalid detail, while the light — a flatterer that cares only for what is smooth and polished — was reflected from the untarnished parts of the rusty muskets, from the white, unsullied spots on the ragged canvas.

Monk and Athos, then, reached this quarter, having under

their eyes a sombre landscape that was partially illuminated both by the silvery rays of the moon and the reddish glare of the expiring fires at the meeting-point of the three causeways. The general halted, and addressing his companion:

"Monsieur," said he, "do you know your road?"

"If I am not mistaken, general, the causeway in the middle leads to the abbey."

"You 're right; but we 'll need a light to guide us in the vaults."

Monk turned round.

"Ah! it seems Digby has been tracking us," said he. "Well, so much the better, he 'll get us what we want."

"Yes, general, I have noticed for some time that a man has been following us."

"Digby!" shouted Monk; "Digby! come here, please."

But instead of obeying, the shadow they had remarked retreated, and, stooping, vanished along the jetty on the left in the direction in which the fishermen were encamped.

"Apparently it was not Digby," observed Monk.

Though both of them gazed after the shadow until it vanished, they were not at all troubled at losing sight of it, for there was nothing strange in a man rambling about a camp containing ten or twelve thousand soldiers.

"Well," said Monk, "as we must have a cresset, or lantern, or torch of some sort or other, to see where we are going, let us try and get a cresset."

"Oh, the first soldier we meet can light us, general," answered Athos.

"No," replied Monk, who wanted to find out if there were any understanding between the count and the fishermen, "no; I think I should prefer to call on one of the Frenchmen who sold me fish to-night. They are going away to-morrow, and so your secret will be safer in their keeping. Why, if there were a rumor that we had found treasures in Newcastle Abbey, the Highlanders in my Scotch army would believe there was a million hidden under every flagstone, and would not leave one stone standing on another in the entire building."

"Do as you like, general," said Athos, in a tone so natural that it was plain he was altogether indifferent as between soldier and sailor.

Monk approached the part of the causeway behind which the man he had taken for Digby had disappeared, and met a

patrol, who was making the round of the tents and going in the direction of headquarters. The general was stopped, as well as his companion; he gave the password and then went on.

A soldier, awakened by the noise, sat up in his plaid to see what was occurring.

"Ask him," said Monk to Athos, "where the fishermen are; if I asked him, he would recognize me."

Athos approached the soldier, who pointed out the tent, and he and Monk proceeded at once toward the quarter in which it was situated. The general fancied that the very moment he drew nigh, a shadow, like the one he had already seen, slipped into this tent; but he must have been mistaken, he thought, for every one was sleeping, all jumbled together, legs and arms intermingled in utter confusion.

Athos, dreading lest he should be suspected of collusion with some of his countrymen, stopped outside the tent.

"Hello!" shouted Monk, in French, "wake up, there!"

Two or three of the sleepers sat up.

"I want a man to carry a light," continued Monk.

Then there was general excitement, and those who did not jump up sat up. The leader was the first to rise.

"You can depend on us, my lord," said he, in a voice that startled Athos. "Where do you want us to go?"

"You 'll see. Get a lantern or torch, and come along quick."

"Yes, my lord. Is it your lordship's pleasure that I go with you?"

"You, or another, it does n't matter; all I want is some one to light me."

"Strange!" thought Athos, "something singular in that fisherman's voice!"

"Get a light, you fellows!" cried the fisherman; "come, stir yourselves!"

Then in an undertone to the one of his comrades nearest him:

"Light up, Menneville," he whispered, "and be prepared for anything."

One of the fishermen struck a spark from a flint, set fire to some tinder, and, with the help of a match, managed to light a lantern.

The entire tent was at once illuminated.

"Are you ready, monsieur?" inquired Monk of Athos, who had turned away to avoid exposing his face to the light.

"Yes, general," he answered.

"Hah! the French gentleman!" said the leader of the fishermen, under his breath. "Hang me if I don't think I'll let you do the work, Menneville; he would, perhaps, recognize me. Do you carry the lantern."

The words were spoken at the back of the tent, and in so low a tone that a single syllable could not be heard by Monk, who, for that matter, was conversing with Athos.

Meanwhile, Menneville was making his preparations, or, rather, receiving the orders of his leader.

"Well?" asked Monk.

"Ready, general," said the fisherman.

Monk, Athos, and the fisherman left the tent.

"Impossible!" mused Athos. "How could such an idea have got into my head!"

"Go on in front," said Monk to the fisherman, "follow the causeway in the middle, and put your best leg foremost."

They had not gone twenty yards when the same shadow which had formerly seemed to enter the tent came out of it, crawled up to the piles, which served as a sort of parapet to the causeway, and, concealed behind them, eagerly watched the course of the general.

They were all soon lost in the fog through which they proceeded toward Newcastle, whose walls, white as sepulchres, were already looming up before them.

After resting a few moments under the porch they entered the abbey. The door had been hacked to pieces. A post of four men slept in one of the corners, evidently perfectly confident that they had no attack to dread in this direction.

"Will not these men be in your way?" said Monk to Athos.

"On the contrary, my lord, they can, with your permission, be of great service to me in rolling out the barrels!"

"You are right."

Though the soldiers were sleeping soundly, the noise made by the footsteps of these two visitors, among the briars and weeds with which the porch was choked up, aroused them immediately. Monk gave the password and penetrated into the interior, still preceded by the man with the lantern. He walked behind Athos also, watching his slightest movement, ready to plunge the dirk he held naked in his hand into the back of the French nobleman if he made the slightest suspi-

cious gesture. But Athos traversed every hall and court with a firm and assured footstep.

Not a door or window remained in the entire building. The doors had been burned on the premises, their charred remains still showing in their indentations the action of the fire, which had died out gradually, utterly powerless to eat into the heart of these massive oak timbers riveted together by iron nails.

As for the windows, all the glass in them had been shattered, and several nocturnal birds, scared by the light of the lantern, made their escape through the vacant panes. At the same time, gigantic bats silently swept in vast circles around the two intruders, the light throwing their wavering shadows on the lofty walls. For observant men the spectacle was reassuring. Monk came to the conclusion that there could be no other persons in the convent, since these wild creatures were its denizens and fled at his approach.

After passing over heaps of rubbish and tearing aside more than one branch of ivy, which seemed to have arrogated to itself the office of protecting this solitude, Athos reached the vaults situated under the principal hall, the entrance to which was through the chapel. Then he paused.

"We are at the spot, general," said he.

"So that is the slab?"

"Yes."

"In fact, I recognized the ring; but it is imbedded flat in the stone."

"We must have a lever."

"It can easily be procured."

And looking around they perceived a small ash tree, three inches in diameter; it was growing in a corner and had shot up to the window, which its branches darkened.

"Have you a knife?" asked Monk of the fisherman.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then cut down that tree."

The fisherman succeeded in doing so, but notched his cutlass badly in the operation. When the ash was pruned and fashioned into a lever the three men entered the vault.

"Remain yonder," said Monk, pointing to a corner of the vault. "We have to dig up some powder, and your lantern might be dangerous."

The fisherman recoiled in terror and kept faithfully to the post assigned him, while Monk and Athos proceeded in the

direction of a pillar at the foot of which a moonbeam had penetrated through an air-hole and was vividly reflected by the very slab the Comte de la Fère had come so far in search of.

"You see we are at the spot," said Athos, pointing to the Latin inscription.

"Yes," said Monk.

Then, as if he wished still to leave the Frenchman a loophole to creep through:

"Do you not notice," he continued, "that some one has been here before us and that several of the statues have been broken?"

"My lord, you must have heard that the Scotch, moved by a spirit of religious reverence, confide to the guardianship of the dead the precious objects they possessed while living. Your soldiers, knowing this, imagined that the pedestals of the statues that adorned most of these tombs covered treasures, and so they broke the pedestals and statues. But the tomb of the venerable canon in which we are interested has no monument to distinguish it. It is unadorned and has been protected by the superstitious fear the Puritans have of sacrilege; not a fragment of this tomb has been chipped off."

"True," said Monk.

Athos seized the lever.

"Shall I help you?" asked Monk.

"Thanks, my lord; I do not wish your lordship to have anything to do with a work the responsibility of which you might not care to assume if you were aware of its probable consequences."

Monk raised his head.

"What do you mean, monsieur?" he inquired.

"I mean — But that man yonder —"

"Wait," said Monk, "I understand your hesitation and will put the fellow to a test."

Monk turned to the fisherman, whose entire profile was lit up by the lantern.

"Come here, my friend," he said in English, and in a tone of command.

The fisherman never moved.

"That will do," he continued, "you see he does not understand English. Speak English, if you please, monsieur."

"My lord," answered Athos, "I have often seen men en-

dowed, in certain circumstances, with sufficient self-control to enable them to refrain from answering a question addressed to them in a language they understood perfectly. This fisherman may be better educated than we imagine. Do me the favor to send him away, my lord."

"Evidently," thought Monk, "he wants to have me alone with him in this vault. No matter, I intend to see this matter out; one man is as good as another, and we are alone. My friend," said he, "go up to the top of the stairs we have just come down and see that we are not interrupted."

The fisherman started to obey.

"Leave your lantern behind you," said Monk; "it would betray your presence, and some stray bullet might come your way."

The fisherman, apparently appreciating this advice, laid down his lantern and vanished under the vault of the stairs.

Monk picked up the lantern and carried it to the foot of the pillar.

"So your money is really concealed under that tomb, is it?" said he.

"Yes, my lord; and in five minutes you will have as little doubt about the fact as I have."

At the same time Athos struck the plaster violently, which split and offered a chink to the point of the lever. He inserted his lever in this chink, and soon entire pieces of plaster yielded, rising up like rounded slabs. Then the count hurled aside the stones with an energy no one would have believed such delicate hands capable of.

"My lord," said he, "this is the masonry of which I spoke to your lordship."

"Yes; but I do not yet see the barrels," said Monk.

"Had I a poniard," answered Athos, looking round him, "you should soon see them. Unfortunately, I left mine behind me in your lordship's tent."

"I would offer you mine with pleasure," said Monk, "but I am afraid the blade is too weak for your purpose."

Athos looked about him, apparently in search of something to take the place of the weapon he wished for.

Monk did not lose sight of a single movement of his hands, of a single expression in his eyes.

"Why don't you ask the fisherman for his cutlass?" said he; "he had a cutlass."

"Ah, you are right," answered Athos; "he used it in cutting down the tree.

"My friend," said he to the fisherman, "throw me down your cutlass, I want it."

The noise of the weapon as it fell down the steps echoed in his ears.

"Take it up," said Monk, "I have seen it, and it is a solid tool; just the kind a sinewy hand can turn to account."

Athos apparently attached no other meaning to the words of Monk than what was implied in their plain, literal signification. He did not notice, either, or at least he did not seem to notice, that whenever he came near Monk, the latter stepped aside, at the same time placing his left hand on the butt of his pistol; he still held his dirk in his right. Athos set to work, then, with his back to Monk, utterly defenceless, his life at the mercy of his companion. He struck the intervening plaster so adroitly and vigorously that in a few seconds it separated into two parts, and Monk could perceive two barrels placed end to end, their weight keeping them motionless in their calcareous sheathing.

"You see, my lord," said Athos, "that I have not been deceived in my anticipations."

"Yes, monsieur," answered Monk, "and I am in good hopes you are satisfied; are you not?"

"Undoubtedly; the loss of this money would have grieved me very sensibly; but I felt assured that God, who protects the good cause, would not have permitted the money that is to contribute to its triumph to be diverted to other uses."

"Upon my honor, monsieur, your words are as mysterious as your actions," said Monk. "When you told me, a while ago, that you did not care to have me share the responsibility of the work we are both engaged in, I confess I was somewhat at a loss as to your meaning."

"I had my own reasons for saying so, my lord."

"And now you speak of the good cause. What do you understand by these words, 'the good cause'? At the present moment we are defending five or six causes in England, and, notwithstanding this, every one regards his own particular cause as not only the good cause, but the best cause of all. Which of them is your cause, monsieur? Speak out boldly and let us see whether upon this point, to which you evidently attach great importance, we are in agreement."

Athos fixed upon Monk one of those piercing looks which seem to challenge the person upon whom the gazer's eyes are riveted to hide a single one of his thoughts. Then, taking off his hat, he began his answer in a solemn voice, while the man who had questioned him covered his face with his hand and then plucked nervously at his beard and mustache with that same long and sinewy hand, his eye wandering vaguely and sadly through the recesses of the vault.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HEART AND MIND.

"My lord," said the Comte de la Fère, "you are a noble Englishman, a loyal gentleman, and you have spoken to a noble Frenchman and an upright man also. I told you the gold in these two barrels was mine; it was wrong; I then uttered the first falsehood I have ever spoken in my whole life, though a falsehood, indeed, uttered on the spur of the moment. This gold is the property of King Charles II., outlawed by his country, exiled from his palace, bereft at once of a father and of a throne, deprived of everything, even of the sad pleasure of kissing on his knees the stone upon which that father's murderers wrote the simple epitaph that will forever cry to Heaven for vengeance:

"'Here lies King Charles I.'"

Monk turned slightly pale, and a scarcely perceptible shudder crept through his veins and stirred his gray mustache.

"I," continued Athos, "I, Comte de la Fère, am the only follower of this poor, forsaken prince that is now left to him. I offered to go in search of the man upon whom the fate of royalty in England depends to-day, and I have done so, have placed myself under the eye of this man, have placed myself naked and defenceless in his hands, and say to him —

"'My lord, you are the last resource of a prince whom God has made your master, whom his birth has made your King; on you, and on you alone, depend his life and his future. Will you use this money to assuage some of the miseries which England has endured during all this anarchy? in a word, will you coöperate with Charles II., or, if you decline to do so,

will you refuse to interfere with his action? You are master and king, an omnipotent master and king, too, for chance sometimes brings to naught the work of time and of God. I stand here in your presence and stand alone, my lord; if an achievement in which I might have a share disconcert you, if my coöperation would but embarrass you — my lord, you are armed, and a grave has been dug already at your feet; if, on the other side, you are intoxicated by your enthusiasm, if your hand in your present enterprise is the servant of your mind, and your mind is the servant of your heart, you have it now in your power to destroy forever the cause of your enemy, Charles Stuart; slay the man you have before your eyes, — for that man will never return to him who sent him here except as the custodian of the treasure confided to him by King Charles I., — and keep the gold which may help you to continue a civil war. Alas! my lord, such is the fatality encompassing the unhappy prince that he must corrupt or he must kill. All men resist and repulse him, all men are hostile to him; yet still his brow is sealed with the divine seal; he cannot prove false to his blood; he must ascend his throne or die on the sacred soil of his country.'

"My lord, you understand the import of my words. To any save the illustrious man who hears me I would say: 'My lord, you are poor; my lord, the King offers you this million as the earnest-money of an immense bargain. Take it, and serve Charles II. as I have served Charles I., and sure I am that God who is listening to us, who sees us, and who alone reads in your heart that which is concealed from all human eyes — sure I am that God, after a blissful death, will bless you with an eternally blissful life.' But to General Monk, to the illustrious man whose greatness I believe I have measured, I say:

"'My lord, a brilliant place is reserved for you in the history of nations and of kings; imperishable and immortal glory is your portion if, without other interest than your country's welfare, without other interest than the interest of justice, you become the mainstay of your King. There have been glorious conquerors, renowned usurpers. Be it yours, my lord, to rest satisfied with being the most honorable, upright, and magnanimous of men. You held a crown in your hand, and, instead of pressing it on your brow, you placed it on the head of its rightful inheritor. Oh, my lord, do this, and you bequeath

to posterity the most envied name that ever human being was proud to bear.'"

Athos paused. During the entire discourse of this high-souled gentleman Monk made not a sign of approval or censure. Indeed, so little did the vehement apostrophe appear to affect him that the absence of all expression in his eyes almost betrayed a lack of intelligence. The Comte de la Fère looked on sadly, and the sight of that sombre visage brought profound discouragement to his heart. After a time Monk exhibited a little more animation, and breaking silence:

"Monsieur," said he, in a soft, grave voice, "in my reply to your address I intend to avail myself of the words you yourself have used. To other than you my answer would be expulsion, a dungeon, or even worse, for you come to me as a tempter and as an aggressor as well. But you are one of those men from whom it is impossible to withhold the attention and respect they deserve; you are, monsieur, a stainless gentleman. I say so, and I am not ignorant whereof I speak. Just now you mentioned a deposit bequeathed by the late King to his son. Are you not one of those gentlemen who, as I have heard, tried to rescue Charles I. at Whitehall?"

"Yes, monsieur, I stood beneath the scaffold during his execution and received on my head the blood of the martyr King, that blood I was unable to save; I also heard the last word that Charles uttered. It was to me he spoke the word 'Remember!' and that word had relation to the treasure that lies at your feet, my lord."

"I have heard a good deal about you, monsieur," said Monk, "but it is a source of pride to me that I appreciated your worth, not from what I have heard, but from my own intuition. I will, therefore, enter into explanations which I refused to offer to anybody before now, and you will thus have it in your power to estimate the distinction I make between you and the persons hitherto sent to me."

Athos bowed, and made ready to absorb greedily the words that fell from the lips of Monk, words as rare and precious as the dew in the desert.

"You have spoken to me," said Monk, "of King Charles II., but would you kindly tell me of what importance to me is this phantom of a king? I have grown old in war and politics, things so closely connected at the present day that every soldier has a personal interest in the combat he wages in behalf of his

principles or his interests; he no longer fights blindly behind his officer, as in ordinary warfare. Now, I may have no ambitions, but I have many apprehensions. The liberty of England and, perhaps, of every Englishman is linked with the war to-day. How can you expect that I, who have made myself a position of entire freedom, should hold out my hands to be fettered by a stranger? For in my eyes Charles II. is but a stranger. He fought a few battles, indeed, in this country, but he lost them: he is, then, a poor captain. He has never yet succeeded in any negotiation: he is a poor diplomatist. He has paraded his miseries before every court in Europe: he must be feeble-minded and weak-hearted. This great genius who aspires to the government of one of the greatest kingdoms on the earth has never given even a sign that there is anything great, or noble, or strong in him. Everything, then, I know about this Charles of yours is unfavorable to him, and you would have me, a man of common sense, offer gratuitously to become the slave of a man who is my inferior in military and political capacity and in personal dignity? No, monsieur, when Charles II., has taught me by some grand and noble deed of his to set a proper value on his character, I may, perhaps, recognize his rights to a throne from which we hurled his father because he was deficient in the very virtues that are lacking in the son. Until then the only rights I acknowledge are my own. The Revolution made me general; if I wish it, my sword will make me Protector. Let Charles II. show himself, let him come forward, let him enter as an athlete into those lists which are always open to genius, and, above all, let him remember that he belongs to a race from which much more is expected than from any other. And so, monsieur, further controversy is useless: I neither refuse nor accept, I reserve myself — I wait."

Athos was aware of Monk's thorough knowledge of everything concerning Charles II., and saw that this was neither the time nor the place to venture on any further discussion.

"My lord," said he, "nothing remains for me to do now except to thank you."

"For what, monsieur? Thank me because you have formed a correct judgment of me and I have acted in accordance with that judgment? Was it really worth your while? This gold you are carrying to King Charles will serve me as an experiment. After seeing the use he makes of it, I

may have a different opinion of him from what I have at present."

"But is not your lordship afraid of being compromised if you permit the departure of a sum of money intended for the support of the forces of your enemy?"

"My enemy, say you? Oh, monsieur, I have no enemies, none. I am in the service of the parliament, which orders me to make war on General Lambert and Charles II., — its enemies, not mine, — and I make war on them. If parliament, on the other hand, ordered me to have London decked with flags, to assemble my soldiers and be ready to receive Charles II. on the coast — "

"You would obey?" cried Athos, joyfully.

"Excuse me," answered Monk, with a smile, "I, an old graybeard, was going — where must my wits have been wandering? — was going, I say, to talk like some silly young man."

"Then you would not obey?" asked Athos.

"I do not say that either, monsieur. The safety of my country is the paramount consideration with me. God, who has been graciously pleased to endow me with force, has doubtless wished that that force should be exercised for the general welfare, and therefore he has also endowed me with some discernment. If the parliament give me such an order, I will reflect."

Athos became gloomy.

"Well, well," said he, "I see clearly that Charles II. has no favor to expect from your lordship."

"M. le Comte, you have quite a fondness for asking me questions; my turn, if you please."

"Ask as many as you like, my lord, and may God inspire you with the purpose of replying to me as frankly as I intend replying to you!"

"When you have handed over this million to your prince, what advice will you give him?"

Athos gazed on Monk proudly and resolutely.

"My lord," said he, "with this million, which others might, perhaps, employ in negotiations, I will advise the King to raise two regiments, to enter Scotland, which you have just pacified, and to grant to the people the liberties the Revolution promised, but did not entirely concede. I shall advise him to command this little army in person, an army that would

increase in numbers, you may rest assured, and to die, if need be, with his flag in his hand, but with his sword in the scabbard, saying: 'Englishmen! I am the third sovereign of my race you have slain: beware of the justice of God!'"

Monk dropped his head on his breast and mused for a moment.

"And if he succeeded, which is improbable, but not impossible, for everything is possible in this world, what advice would you give him?"

"To think that he lost his crown by the will of God and has recovered it by the good will of men."

An ironical smile flickered on the lips of Monk.

"Unfortunately," said he, "kings are not in the habit of taking good advice."

"Ah, my lord," replied Athos, smiling in turn, but with a smile that differed entirely from that of Monk, "Charles II. is not a king."

"Well, we had best cut the matter short — don't you think so, M. le Comte?"

Athos bowed.

"I will give orders at once to have your two barrels carried to your residence. Where do you lodge, monsieur?"

"At a little hamlet on the mouth of the river, my lord."

"Oh, I know it — it has only five or six houses, I believe?"

"You are right, and I live in the first one. Two net-makers are staying in it also; it was their boat that put me ashore."

"But your own vessel, monsieur?"

"It is at anchor, a quarter of a mile out at sea, and is waiting for me."

"Still, you are not going to start immediately?"

"My lord, I should like to wait and make another effort to convince your lordship."

"You would not succeed," answered Monk. "It is important, however, that you leave Newcastle without giving rise to any suspicion calculated to reflect either on yourself or on me. My officers fancy that I shall be attacked by Lambert tomorrow. On the other hand, I am ready to take my oath that he will not budge an inch; to do so, in my opinion, would be impossible. His soldiers have no fixed principles, pull one way and another; an army composed of such elements is no army. Now, I have been careful to let my soldiers see that I am myself subordinate to a higher authority. Consequently

they are all, both officers and men, ready for any enterprise whatever, and consequently, if I were to die — and that may happen at any moment — it would take some time to demoralize them. Nay, if I felt like going away from the camp for a time — and I am occasionally absent from it — I could do so with the certainty that there would not be the slightest anxiety or disorder. I am a sort of magnet, a sort of natural and sympathetic force by which the English are attracted, and I shall draw all the scattering weapons that are sent against me to my side. Lambert at this moment commands eighteen thousand intending deserters. You can easily imagine I do not tell my officers anything of this. The very best thing that can happen to an army is for it to believe it is on the eve of a battle; it keeps every man in it on the alert, every man on his guard. My object in letting you into the secret is to show that you are perfectly safe in staying here. Do not be in any hurry, then, to cross over; within a week from now you'll hear of something; it may be a battle or it may be a truce. Then, as you have shown your confidence in my honor by trusting me with your secret, I will either visit you or ask you to visit me. Do not leave, therefore, until you hear from me; I urgently request you not to do so."

"I am at your orders, general," exclaimed Athos, with a joy so uncontrollable that, in spite of all his prudence, it gleamed for a moment in his eyes. Monk saw the flash and quenched it immediately with one of those ambiguous smiles that threw those who had dealings with him into a state of uncertainty just at the moment they fancied they had enlisted him on their side.

"And so, my lord," said Athos, "you wish me to remain here a week, exactly?"

"Yes, a week, monsieur."

"And what shall I do during this week?"

"If there is a battle, I must request you to keep out of it. I know how curious Frenchmen are about such amusements; you would like to see how we fight, and might, very likely, have a stray shot come your way. Our Scotchmen are very poor marksmen, and I have no wish that an honest gentleman like you should return home with a bullet in him. Besides, I am not at all anxious to be obliged to send back to your prince, on my own authority, the million you would have to leave behind you. Were I to do so it would be said, and with some

show of reason, that I was bribing the pretender to make war on the parliament. And now we have said enough, monsieur; we have agreed upon a certain course, let us keep to it."

"Ah! my lord," said Athos, "what joy were mine if I were the first to read the secret of the noble heart that beats under that cloak!"

"So you will persist in believing I have secrets?" answered Monk, but still with the somewhat playful expression on his face it had held during the interview. "The empty head of a mere soldier contain secrets! Oh, monsieur! But it is getting late and our lantern is nearly out. We had better summon the fellow who came with us. *Holà!*" cried Monk, in French, going to the staircase; "come here, fisherman!"

The fisherman, whose limbs were benumbed by the cold night air, replied in a hoarse voice by asking what was wanted.

"Go to the next post," said Monk, "and bid the sergeant, in the name of General Monk, to come here at once."

There was little difficulty in obeying the order, for the sergeant, puzzled by the general's presence in this lonely abbey at such an hour, had gradually approached, until he was now only a few yards from the fisherman.

He had, therefore, heard the general's words, and ran up directly.

"Take a horse and two men," said Monk.

"A horse and two men?" repeated the sergeant.

"Yes," answered Monk. "Can you find a horse with a pack-saddle or two panniers?"

"To be sure, general, in the Scotch camp a hundred yards from here."

"Very good."

"What am I to do with the horse, general?"

"Come here."

The sergeant descended the three or four steps that separated him from Monk, and entered the vault.

"Do you see," said Monk, "where that gentleman is standing?"

"Yes, general."

"Do you see yonder two barrels?"

"Perfectly."

"One of them holds powder, the other balls. I wish to have them carried to the hamlet on the river, which I intend

garrisoning to-morrow with two hundred soldiers. You understand that my orders to you are to be kept secret, for the fate of a battle may hang on this movement."

"Oh, general!" murmured the sergeant.

"So be careful! You will have these barrels fastened on to the horse, and yourself and two soldiers will see that they are carried safely to the lodgings of this gentleman, who is a friend of mine. You understand, of course, that no one is to know of this."

"If I knew a path, I could go by way of the marsh," said the sergeant.

"I know of one," said Athos; "it is not wide, but it is solid, for it was built on piles; if we are careful, we can pass over it easily."

"Do whatever this gentleman tells you," said Monk.

"Ugh! but these barrels are heavy!" cried the sergeant as he tried to lift one of them.

"Each of them ought to weigh four hundred pounds; that is, if they hold as much as they should hold; am I not right, monsieur?"

"Pretty nearly so," said Athos.

The sergeant went in search of the horse and the two soldiers. Monk, as soon as Athos and he were alone, contrived to limit the conversation to indifferent topics, while occasionally glancing carelessly round the vault. Then, on hearing the steps of the horse:

"I leave you with your men, monsieur," said he, "I wish to return to the camp. You are perfectly safe."

"I shall see you again, shall I not, my lord?" asked Athos.

"We are agreed upon that, monsieur. It will give me the greatest pleasure to meet you."

He offered his hand to Athos.

"Ah!" murmured the count, "if you only wished, my lord!"

"Hush!" answered Monk, "it is understood between us that there will be no further mention of that."

And after saluting Athos, he went up the steps, passing on the way the soldiers who were coming down. He had not gone twenty yards when a faint but prolonged whistle came to his ears. He started; as he saw nothing, however, he continued his course. Then he thought of the fisherman, and turned round to look for him; the fisherman had vanished.

If he had made a more attentive examination he might have seen this same fisherman, bent double, gliding like a serpent through the rocks and quickly disappearing in the fog that was skimming along the surface of the marsh; if he had made a strong effort to pierce the darkness, he might also have witnessed a spectacle calculated to interest him. The masts of the fisherman's vessel were no longer where they had been and were as close to the river bank as they could get.

But Monk perceived nothing of all this, and utterly unconscious of any threatened danger, he entered the lonely causeway that led to his camp. It was not until then that the fisherman's disappearance struck him as singular, and that it began to look really suspicious. He had just placed the only outpost that could now protect him at the service of Athos, and he had still a mile to travel before he reached the camp.

The fog rose higher and grew thicker; it was impossible to discern an object ten yards away.

Monk then fancied he heard the muffled sound of an oar in the marsh on his right.

"Who goes there?" he cried.

But there was no answer. He cocked his pistol, drew his sword, and quickened his pace. He would not, however, summon help. He thought that to do so, when he was not in any absolute peril, would be unworthy of him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DAY AFTER.

It was seven in the morning: the first rays of the light of day shone on the pools, and the sun was reflected in their depths like a red ball of fire when Athos awoke and opened the window of his bed-chamber looking out on the river's banks. At a distance of some fifteen yards he perceived that the sergeant and the men who had been with him on the night before had left the barrels at his lodgings, and had then returned to camp by the causeway on the right.

Why had these men come back here after going to the camp? This was the question that suddenly flashed across the mind of Athos.

The sergeant, with head erect, was apparently waiting to speak to the count as soon as he got up. Athos could not help expressing his astonishment at the presence in his neighborhood of the men whose departure he had witnessed on the previous night.

"There is no reason why you should be surprised, sir," answered the sergeant. "The general gave me orders yesterday to watch over your safety, and of course it was my duty to obey."

"Is the general in the camp?" inquired Athos.

"No doubt he is, sir, for he was going there last night when he left you."

"Wait for me, then; I am going there both for the purpose of bearing witness to the fidelity with which you have accomplished your task, and to get my sword, which I left behind me yesterday."

"Nothing could turn out better, sir," said the sergeant, "I was just about to ask you to come along with me."

Athos thought that he noticed an expression of spurious good-nature on the sergeant's face; but the adventure in the vault might have piqued the fellow's curiosity, and it was not strange that his features should betray to some extent the workings of his mind.

He carefully locked the doors and handed the keys to Grimaud, who, by the way, had elected to sleep in the very shed which led to the vault in which the barrels had been shut up. The sergeant escorted the count to the camp. There a fresh guard was stationed, which relieved the four soldiers and took charge of Athos.

This guard was commanded by the aide-de-camp Digby, who, on the way, looked at Athos in such a strange and unfriendly manner that the Frenchman wondered what could be the occasion of such watchfulness and severity, as he had been left perfectly free the evening before.

But he proceeded quietly to headquarters, concealing in his own breast the feelings to which men and things were giving rise. He found in the general's tents, into which he had been shown on the previous evening, three superior officers.

None of them had ever met Athos, and, consequently, none of them could recognize him. In fact, Monk's lieutenant, after a close examination of his face, inquired whether he were the gentleman who had left the tent with the general.

"Yes, sir," answered the sergeant, "he is the same."

"But," said Athos, haughtily, "I have no intention of denying it. And now, gentlemen, you will permit me to ask the meaning of all these questions, and I hope also you will explain the meaning of the tone in which you choose to put them."

"Sir," replied the lieutenant, "we ask these questions because we have the right to ask them, and, believe me, the tone in which we put them is just the tone which the circumstances call for."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "it is plain you do not know who I am; but I should inform you that I can recognize no one as my equal here except General Monk. Where is he? Bring me before him, and, if he have any questions to ask me, I will answer them to his satisfaction. I repeat, gentlemen, where is your general?"

"Zounds, sir!" retorted the lieutenant; "you know where he is better than we do."

"I?"

"Of course, you."

"Sir," said Athos, "I do not understand you."

"You 'll understand me soon enough, and, in the first place, you would act wisely by not talking quite so loud, sir. What did the general say to you yesterday?"

Athos smiled scornfully.

"This is not a time for smiling," cried one of the colonels, angrily. "It is a time for answering."

"And I declare, gentlemen, I have not the slightest intention of answering except in the general's presence."

"But," said the same colonel who had already spoken, "you know what you ask is impossible."

"This is the second time that I have received this singular reply to my request," rejoined Athos. "Is the general absent?"

The question was put in such apparent good faith, and the speaker's countenance wore an air of such ingenuous amazement, that the three officers exchanged looks. The lieutenant, who by a sort of tacit agreement seemed to act as the representative of the two colonels, resumed.

"Sir," said he, "the general took leave of you in the monastery last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"And then you went —"

"It is not for me to say where. Ask those who were with me; they are your own soldiers. Why not question them?"

"But suppose it be our pleasure to question you instead?"

"In that case it is my pleasure to answer, sir, that I am not amenable to the authority of any person here; I know none here save your general, and only him shall I answer."

"Be that as it may, sir, we are the masters; we form a council of war, and as you are in presence of your judges you must certainly answer."

Instead of the terror the officers expected this threat would inspire, the face of Athos expressed nothing but surprise and disdain.

"Scotch or English judges for me, a subject of the King of France! for me, placed under the safeguard of British honor! You are mad, gentlemen!" said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

The officers again exchanged glances.

"So," said one of them, "you pretend not to know where the general is?"

"To that you have already had my answer, sir."

"Yes, but it is an answer we find it impossible to believe."

"It is true, nevertheless, gentlemen. As a rule, people of my rank do not tell lies. I am, as I have informed you, a gentleman, and when I wear the sword which, from an over-scrupulous feeling of delicacy, I left yesterday on yonder table, where it still lies, you may rest assured that no one ventures to utter in my presence anything I object to hearing. To-day I am disarmed; if you claim to be my judges, judge me; if you are but my executioners, kill me."

"But, sir —" the lieutenant was beginning in a more courteous tone, for he was affected by the grandeur and composure of Athos.

"Sir," interrupted the count, "I came hither to discuss confidentially with your general matters of great importance. The manner in which he received me was quite exceptional. The soldiers who saw us together will tell you so, if you question them. If your general treated me with such distinction, then it must have been because he knew I was worthy of it. Now you do not imagine, I presume, that as I am not inclined to reveal my own secrets to you, I am likely to reveal his to you."

"Yes, but what did these barrels contain?"

"You put this question to your soldiers, did you not? What was their answer?"

"That they contained powder and ball."

"And from whom did they get their information? They must have told you that, too."

"From the general; but we are not dupes."

"Take care, sir; you are now giving the lie, not to me, but to your commander."

The officers sought one another's eyes. Athos continued:

"Your general requested me, in the presence of his soldiers, to remain here a week, during which he should give me the answer he had promised. Have I fled? No, I am waiting."

"He wished you to wait for a week!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"And expressed his wish so strongly that, though I have a sloop anchored in the mouth of the river, in which I could have easily embarked yesterday, I have not done so. I have stayed here solely in compliance with the request of your general. As his lordship has desired me not to depart before having a final interview with him, the time for which he fixed in a week, I am waiting, as I have already stated."

The lieutenant, turning to the two other officers, said in an undertone:

"If this gentleman is telling the truth, there is still some hope. The general may be engaged in some secret negotiation about which he deemed it imprudent to give even us any information. In that case he might have intended to be absent a week."

Then, addressing Athos:

"The statement you have just made," said he, "is of the greatest importance, sir. Would you have any objection to repeating it on oath?"

"Sir," answered Athos, "among the class of persons with whom I have always associated, my mere word has been regarded as the most sacred of oaths."

"But, sir, the present circumstances are of a far graver nature than any with which you can have hitherto been connected. The safety of an entire army is involved. Pray, turn this thought over in your mind — the general has disappeared and we are using all our efforts to find him. Is his disappearance natural? Has a crime been committed? Ought we to

leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of our investigations, or ought we to wait patiently? At the present moment, sir, everything may depend upon what you tell us."

"When your questions assume such a form, sir, I have no hesitation in answering them," said Athos. "Yes, I came hither to have a confidential interview with General Monk, and to request an answer which might have a bearing on certain important interests. It is equally true that, as he did not find it convenient to give me an answer before the expected battle, he desired me to remain for a week in the house where I lodge, promising that in a week I should see him again. Yes, all this is absolutely true, and I affirm its truth in the name of that God who is the master of my life and of yours."

There was such an air of grandeur and solemnity about Athos as he uttered these words that the three officers were almost convinced. However, one of the colonels urged a final objection.

"Sir," said he, "however persuaded we may be of your truthfulness, this whole matter is singularly mysterious. The general is far too prudent to have quitted his army on the eve of a battle without, at least, notifying some of us. So far as I am concerned, I am perfectly sure that some untoward incident is at the bottom of his disappearance. Yesterday a party of foreign fishermen came here to sell their fish; they had their quarters over yonder among the Scotch, exactly as you can see, on the road taken by the general on his visit with you to the abbey and on his return. It was one of those fishermen who lighted the general on his way, and this morning there is no sign of either ship or crew, both having vanished with last night's tide."

"I don't see anything out of the way in that," said the lieutenant; "after all, these people were not prisoners."

"No; but I repeat it was one of them who carried a lantern for this gentleman and the general as far as the abbey vaults, and Digby himself has informed us that the general was inclined to be very suspicious of these fellows. Now, is it not quite possible that these fishermen may have had an understanding with this very gentleman, and that, when once the blow was struck, he remained behind — there can be no question of his bravery — for the purpose of allaying our suspicions and inducing us to search in the wrong direction?"

This discourse made a deep impression on the other two officers.

"Sir," replied Athos, "permit me to say that your reasoning, however plausible in appearance, is utterly erroneous, so far as it affects me. I have remained here, you say, to ward off suspicions. Well, gentlemen, I have my suspicions as well as you, and I am about to lay them before you. Like you, I believe it impossible for the general to have gone away on the eve of a battle without informing some one of his intended absence. Yes, there is some untoward incident at the bottom of all this, and, instead of looking idly on and waiting, you should display the utmost vigilance and activity. I am your prisoner, gentlemen, upon parole or otherwise. My honor, until it is known what has become of General Monk, is at stake, and I feel this so keenly that, if you told me to go, I should answer: 'No, I stay.' And if you cared to ask my opinion, my answer would be: 'Yes, the general is the victim of a conspiracy, for, had he intended leaving the camp, he would have told me so. Search, therefore; examine every corner of both land and sea; either the general is not absent, or, if he be, he is assuredly not absent of his own free will.'"

After making a sign to the other two officers, the lieutenant said:

"No, sir, not by any means; it is your turn now to go to extremes. The general has not been affected by any events that may have occurred; no doubt but that, on the contrary, he has had the direction of them. What Monk has just done, he has often done. It is foolish of us, therefore, to feel alarmed. I have no doubt that his absence will be of short duration. We ought to be very careful, therefore, to prevent any report of it from getting abroad; it might result in utterly demoralizing the army, and such pusillanimousness on our part would be regarded by the general as a crime. The general has given us a signal proof of the confidence which he has placed in us; let us show ourselves worthy of it. Gentlemen, let us conceal this matter under an impenetrable veil of silence. We will detain this gentleman, not because we imagine him to have any connection with a crime, but for the more effectual protection of the secret of the general's absence, by keeping it among ourselves. And so, sir, you will please to remain at headquarters until further notice."

"Gentlemen, you forget that last night the general entrusted

to my guardianship a certain deposit, enjoining me to watch carefully over it. Place as many guards around me as you please, nay, load me with chains if you like, but let the house in which I now lodge be my prison. I pledge my honor as a gentleman that, on his return, the general will be seriously displeased with you if you run counter to his wishes in this."

The officers deliberated together for a few moments, after which the lieutenant said:

"Very well, sir, you may return to your lodgings."

Then they placed over Athos a guard of fifty men, who watched his house so closely that every movement he made could be detected.

The secret was well kept, but hours and days slipped by, and the general did not return. Nor was any news received of him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CONTRABAND ON BOARD.

Two days after the events we have just related, and at a time when General Monk was vainly expected to return to his camp at any moment, a little Dutch felucca, with a crew of ten men, anchored off the coast of Scheveningen, within about a gunshot of land. This happened in the depth of night; it was pitch dark and it was high tide. No better hour could have been selected for landing goods and passengers.

The roadstead of Scheveningen forms a vast crescent. As it is neither very deep nor very safe, the only vessels seen in it are a few Flemish hoys or some of those Dutch barks, which are hauled up the sands on rollers, according to the fashion of the ancients, as we are told by Virgil. When the tide is mounting and sweeping over the shore it is not altogether prudent to bring a vessel too near the coast, for, if the wind is fresh, the prows sink into the sand, and the sand on this coast, being spongy, does not easily let go what it gets hold of. It was very likely for this reason that a boat was launched from this particular vessel as soon as it cast anchor; the boat, manned by eight sailors and containing some object of oblong form in the centre which bore some resemblance to a hamper or a bale, headed for shore.

The shore was deserted ; the few fishermen that lived on the downs were all in bed. The sentry who guarded the coast — and very poorly guarded it was; what was the use ? no large ship could effect a landing — was unable to follow entirely the fishermen's example, but he did the best he could and was now sleeping as soundly at the back of his sentry-box as were those who had a bed to lie in. The only audible sound was the whistling of the night breeze through the heath on the downs. But those who were drawing near were suspicious folk, doubtless, for this apparent and real silence and solitude did not have a reassuring effect on them ; their boat, an almost invisible speck on the ocean, glided along noiselessly ; they did not row, which implied that they were desirous of avoiding notice, and they made for the nearest point of land.

As soon as the launch touched bottom, a man jumped out of it, after giving an order in that curt tone that bespeaks the habit of command. In obedience to the order several muskets gleamed in the faint light reflected from the sea, that mirror of the heavens, and the oblong object of which we have already spoken — clearly it must have held merchandise of a contraband character — was transported on shore with infinite care. Then the man who had been the first to land ran in a diagonal direction to the nearest point of the wood. When there he made his way to a certain house of which we have already caught a glimpse through the trees, and which was, as, indeed, we have stated, the temporary and exceedingly modest abode of a personage styled by courtesy King of England.

All the household, like all the other households, was asleep. But a huge dog, of the race of those harnessed by the Scheveningen fishermen to their little wagons to carry their fish to the Hague, barked loudly as soon as the stranger's footsteps echoed under the windows. This evidence of vigilance, however, did not alarm the newcomer ; on the contrary, it delighted him ; for while his own voice might prove unequal to the task of rousing up the people of the cottage, with such a capable auxiliary his voice was hardly needed at all. The stranger, therefore, waited until these sonorous and repeated barks had produced their natural effect, as they were pretty sure to do, and then ventured on a shout on his own behalf. At the sound of his voice the dog began such a howling that another voice could soon be heard trying to quiet the animal. When the brute was somewhat mollified :

"What do you want?" inquired a voice, weak and broken, but refined.

"I wish to see his Majesty King Charles II.," answered the stranger.

"What do you want with him?"

"I wish to speak with him."

"Who are you?"

"Ah, *mordioux!* you ask too many questions; I don't care to carry on a dialogue with you through the door."

"But you can tell me your name."

"I do not care to tell my name, either, in the open air. Besides, you need n't fear that I am going to eat your dog. I hope in God he 'll keep as clear of me as I shall of him."

"Perhaps you bring news, monsieur?" replied the patient, quavering voice of the old man.

"You may take your oath on it, and news you little expected! Please open, I say!"

"Monsieur," returned the old man, "will you say, on your soul and conscience, that your news is worth waking the King for?"

"For God's sake, my dear monsieur, draw the bolts! I pledge you my word you won't be sorry for your trouble. I am worth my weight in gold, 'pon my honor!"

"Still, monsieur, I cannot open unless you tell me your name."

"Must I, then?"

"It is my master's orders, monsieur."

"Well, my name is — But I give you notice my name won't mean anything to you."

"No matter, give it to me."

"Then, I am the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

The old man uttered a cry.

"Ah, great God!" exclaimed the voice on the other side of the door. "M. d'Artagnan! how glad I am! I was perfectly sure I knew that voice!"

"Indeed!" said D'Artagnan, "so my voice is known here! How flattering!"

"Oh, yes, and known very well, too," answered the old man, drawing the bolts, "and I am giving you a proof of it."

And with these words he let in D'Artagnan, who recognized the obstinate individual with whom he had parleyed, by the light of a lantern the latter held in his hand.

"Ah, *mordioux!*" cried the ex-lieutenant, "it 's Parry! I should never have suspected it."

"Yes, Parry, my dear M. d'Artagnan, it is I; and how delighted I am to see you again!"

"'Delighted' is a good word," answered D'Artagnan, grasping the old man's hand. "It means that you will inform the King of my presence, does it not?"

"But the King is asleep, my dear monsieur."

"*Mordioux!* then waken him. Take my word for it, he won't scold you for disturbing him."

"You were sent hither by the count, were you not?"

"What count?"

"The Comte de la Fère."

"By Athos? By my faith, no; I was sent by myself. Stir yourself, Parry, I want to see the King! the King, I say!"

Parry did not see the utility of further resistance; he knew D'Artagnan of old; he knew that, Gascon though he was, his deeds always bettered his words. He crossed a yard and a little garden, quieted the dog, who evidently yearned to find out how a musketeer tasted, but retired to knock his head against the shutter of a room forming the ground floor of a little pavilion.

Immediately a small dog, one of the occupants of this room, gave tongue to the big dog that was the sole occupant of the yard.

"Poor King!" thought D'Artagnan; "and these are his royal bodyguards! Well, he is not the worse guarded on that account!"

"What is all this noise about?" inquired the King from the back of the room.

"Sire, the Chevalier d'Artagnan is here and brings news," answered Parry.

Thereupon the sound of footsteps was heard in the apartment; the door opened, and a flood of light filled the corridor and the garden.

The King was working by the light of a lamp. Papers were scattered over his desk, and he had begun the rough draft of a letter; the numerous erasures on it proved that his task was not an easy one.

"Enter, M. le Chevalier," said he.

Then, as he turned round and perceived an ordinary fisherman:

"What was it you told me, Parry?" asked Charles 'Where is M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan?"

"He is before you, Sire," answered D'Artagnan.

"In that garb?"

"Yes. Look at me, Sire. Do you not remember seeing me in the ante chambers of King Louis XIV.?"

"Certainly I do, monsieur, and I remember, too, that I had every reason to be pleased with you."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"It was my duty to act as I did, as soon as I was aware that I was brought into relation with your Majesty."

"You bring me news, you say?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"From the King of France, I presume?"

"Faith, no, Sire," answered D'Artagnan. "You must have seen at Blois that the King of France's thoughts were engrossed by his own majesty."

Charles raised his eyes to heaven.

"No," continued D'Artagnan; "no, Sire. The news I bring entirely refers to personal acts of my own. But I venture to hope that your Majesty will incline a favorable ear both to the facts and the news."

"Speak, monsieur."

"If I am not in error your Majesty said a good deal at Blois about the embarrassing position of your affairs in England."

Charles reddened.

"Monsieur," said he "the King of France was the only person to whom I related —"

"Oh, your Majesty does not do me justice," said the musketeer, coolly. "I know how to speak to kings in misfortune; it is only when they are in misfortune that they speak to me; when they are no longer unfortunate they forget me. I have, at present, for your Majesty the greatest reverence and devotion, and believe me, Sire, in my case that fact has a good deal of significance. Now, when I heard your Majesty complaining of fate, I discovered that you were noble, generous, and bore misfortune well."

"Upon my word," observed the astonished prince, "I do not know which I ought to prefer — the freedom of your language or your reverence and devotion."

"You will soon have an opportunity of choosing, Sire.

Well, then, your Majesty complained of the difficulty you experienced in returning to England and mounting your throne without men or money."

Charles could not restrain an impatient gesture.

"And the principal obstacle in your way," continued D'Artagnan, "was a certain general in command of the parliamentary army, who was playing the part of a second Cromwell. Was not this something like what your Majesty said?"

"Yes, monsieur; but I repeat that these words were for the ear of the King alone."

"And you 'll soon see, Sire, that it was very lucky for you they fell on the ears of his lieutenant of musketeers. The man who has been giving your Majesty so much trouble is General Monk, I believe. Was not that the name your Majesty pronounced?"

"Yes, monsieur; but allow me to ask once more what do you mean by these questions?"

"Oh, I am well aware, Sire, that etiquette does not permit kings to be questioned. Still, I am hopeful that, after a little, your Majesty will pardon my lack of etiquette. Your Majesty added that, if you could meet and confer with this man face to face, you would triumph over the only serious obstacle that stood in your path, the only real one you had to encounter, and would triumph either by force or persuasion."

"All that you say is true, monsieur; my fate and my future, my glory or my humiliation, are all dependent on this man; but what inference do you draw from that?"

"This one: if General Monk is such a stumbling block in your way as your Majesty says he is, then it should be your Majesty's policy either to get rid of him or to make an ally of him."

"Monsieur, a king who, as you know, for you heard my conversation with the King, has neither army nor money, has not much chance of success with a man like Monk."

"Yes, Sire, I was quite aware that such was your opinion; but, fortunately for you, it was not mine."

"What do you mean?"

"That, without either army or million, I have effected what your Majesty believed you could effect only with the aid of both."

"Eh? What is this you are telling me? What have you done?"

"What have I done? Faith, Sire, I have crossed over the water and captured the man who has proved such an impediment to your Majesty's plans."

"In England?"

"Precisely, Sire."

"You have gone to England and captured Monk there?"

"I hope what I have done is not wrong."

"Really, monsieur, you must be mad!"

"Not a bit mad, Sire."

"You have captured Monk, you say?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Where?"

"In the middle of his camp."

The King shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"And after seizing him on the Newcastle causeway, I have brought him to your Majesty," said D'Artagnan, modestly.

"Brought him to me!" cried the King, indignant at what he considered a mystification.

"Yes, Sire," replied D'Artagnan, in the same tone, "I have brought him to you; he is over yonder in a big chest pierced with holes to allow him to breathe."

"Great God!"

"Oh, you need not be uneasy, Sire, we have taken every care of him. He was landed safe and sound, in perfect condition. Would your Majesty like to see and talk with him, or would you prefer to have us fling him into the sea?"

"Great God!" repeated Charles, "great God! Are you really telling me the truth, monsieur? Surely you would not insult me with some low practical joke! But that you should have succeeded in such an unheard-of adventure of genius and audacity! Oh, it is impossible!"

"Will your Majesty allow me to open the window?" said D'Artagnan, going to it.

It was opened before the King had time to say "yes." D'Artagnan gave a shrill, prolonged whistle, which he repeated three times in the silence of the night.

"Good!" said he; "they are bearing him to your Majesty's presence."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN BEGINS TO FEAR IT WILL GO HARD WITH PLANCHET'S MONEY AND WITH HIS OWN.

The King was absolutely thunderstruck, and stared, now at the musketeer's smiling face, now at the window open to the night. But before he could collect his ideas, eight of D'Artagnan's men — two stayed behind to keep a watch on the vessel — carried to the house the oblong-shaped object which was now big with the fate of England, and which Parry met at the door.

Before leaving Calais, D'Artagnan had got a sort of coffin made, of sufficient width and depth to enable a man to turn round easily. The bottom and sides were lined with comfortable cushions, forming a bed so soft that the pitching of the vessel could not harm the tenant of this novel cage. There was a little grating in it, somewhat like the visor of a helmet, exactly opposite the prisoner's face. Its mechanism was so artfully constructed that the slightest cry could be stifled by a sudden pressure, and, if necessary, the utterer of the cry as well.

D'Artagnan, from his thorough knowledge both of his crew and of his captive, was afraid of two things happening during the voyage: the general might prefer death to this strange slavery, and so give a shout for the very purpose of getting strangled, or he might tempt his guards by offering a magnificent reward to release him and put the lieutenant in the box instead of the general.

For this reason D'Artagnan had passed two days and two nights alone with Monk, offering him all kinds of refreshments, which he refused, and doing his very best to convince him that his queer duress would have a pleasant ending. With two pistols on the table and a naked sword within reach, D'Artagnan felt perfectly competent to deal with any difficulty from outside.

Once at Scheveningen, he felt completely reassured. His men had a wholesome dread of any conflict with the lords of the soil. He had, besides, gained over one of them, who really acted as his lieutenant, and whom we have seen answering to the name of Menneville. The latter, who was by no means a

commonplace fellow, had more to risk than the others, for he had a conscience. He also believed there was a future for him in D'Artagnan's service, and he would, therefore, have allowed himself to be chopped up into mincemeat rather than disobey the orders given him by his leader. And so, as soon as they had landed, D'Artagnan confided to his care the general's chest and the general's respiration. It was he, too, to whom he gave directions for the transportation of the chest by seven men, as soon as three whistles reached his ears.

As we have seen, D'Artagnan's lieutenant could be depended on.

When the chest was inside the King's house, the musketeer dismissed his men with a gracious smile, and said:

"Gentlemen, you have rendered a great service to King Charles II., who, before six weeks, will be King of England; your gratuity will then be doubled. Return to the boat and wait for me there."

Whereupon they all retreated with such joyous yelling and whooping that even the dog was dismayed.

D'Artagnan ordered the chest to be carried into the King's antechamber. He carefully closed all the doors, unlocked the chest, and said to the general:

"General, I have a thousand apologies to offer you; that the methods I have adopted have been unworthy of a man of your eminence, I know full well; but it was really necessary that you should fancy I was a skipper. You see it would have been practically impossible for me to have carried you about with me over England. I hope, therefore, you will take all this into consideration. But, now that I have you here, general," continued D'Artagnan, "you are free to get up and walk."

When he had finished his discourse he cut the ropes that bound the general's hands and arms. Monk rose to his feet and then sat down, all with the air of a man who expects nothing but death. D'Artagnan then opened the door of the King's study and said:

"Sire, your enemy, General Monk, is present. I was resolved to do what I have done in furtherance of your cause. It is done, so give your orders. General Monk," he added, turning to the prisoner, "you are in presence of his Majesty King Charles II., Sovereign Lord of Great Britain."

Monk fixed on the young prince his cold, stoical eyes.

"I know no King of Great Britain; I know no one here who is even worthy of bearing the name of gentleman; for it was in the name of King Charles II. that an emissary, whom I took for an honest man, set an infamous trap for me. I have been caught in it — so much the worse for me. And now, as for you, the tempter," said he to the King, "and as for you, his agent," — to D'Artagnan, — "think well on what I am about to say to you — you have my body, you can slay it, and I urge you to do so, for my soul or my will you shall never have. And now, ask me no further questions; from this moment my lips shall not utter even a cry. I have done."

He spoke these words with all the ferocity and invincible obstinacy that mark the cankered soul of the Puritan. D'Artagnan looked at his prisoner as a man might look who knows the value of words, and measures their value by the tone in which they are pronounced.

"The fact is," he whispered to the King, "that the general is a man of iron resolution. He refused to eat a mouthful of bread or swallow a drop of wine during the last two days. But from this on, his fate will be decided by your Majesty, and I wash my hands of it, as Pilate said."

Monk stood before them, pale and resigned, with steadfast eyes and folded arms.

D'Artagnan turned to him.

"You must understand perfectly," said he, "that your phrases — and they are, I admit, very beautiful — can be of no service to anybody, not even to yourself. His Majesty desired an interview with you, you refused it. Now that you are face to face with your King, brought hither by a force independent of your will, why should you compel us to adopt a rigorous course in your regard, which I acknowledge to be both useless and absurd? Hang it, man, open your mouth, though it be only to say 'No!'"

But Monk neither opened his mouth nor changed the direction of his eyes. He stroked his mustache with the anxious air of a man who believes things are at their worst.

During all this time Charles II. remained in a profound reverie. For the first time in his life he confronted Monk, confronted the man he had so longed to see, and, with that peculiar glance which God bestows on eagles and kings, he had fathomed the very depths of his heart.

He saw that Monk was firmly resolved to die rather than speak, which was not astonishing, considering the greatness of the cruel wound that had been inflicted on his pride. Charles II. at that very moment took one of those decisive steps upon which an ordinary man stakes his life, a general his fortunes, a king his kingdom.

"Monsieur," said he to Monk, "as to some points you are perfectly correct. I do not, therefore, ask you to answer, but to hear me."

There was a moment's silence, during which the King fixed his eyes on Monk, who remained impassive.

"You have just now wounded me by a very grievous accusation," continued the King. "You have said that an emissary of mine went to Newcastle for the purpose of entrapping you — and I may as well mention, incidentally, that your allusion is utterly incomprehensible to M. d'Artagnan, to whom I owe my most grateful thanks for his generous and heroic devotion."

D'Artagnan bowed respectfully. Monk did not move a muscle.

"For M. d'Artagnan — and do me the favor to believe that I do not say this for the purpose of excusing myself — because M. d'Artagnan," continued the King, "went to England of his own free will, directed by no one, and without either influence or hope to encourage him, like the true gentleman he is, his sole ambition to be of service to an unfortunate King, and to add another noble deed to the illustrious actions associated with his heroic life."

D'Artagnan blushed slightly, and coughed to keep in countenance. Monk never stirred.

"You do not believe me, general?" resumed the King. "I can easily understand that; the proofs of such devotion are so rare that their reality may well be doubted."

"General Monk would be acting very unjustifiably not to believe you, Sire," cried D'Artagnan, "for what your Majesty states is the exact truth, so true, indeed, that it would now seem my pursuit of the general has seriously damaged your Majesty's cause. If such be the case, it will drive me to despair."

"M. d'Artagnan," exclaimed the King, taking the musketeer's hand, "I feel more indebted to you, I assure you, than if you had achieved the triumph of my cause, for you have

revealed to me an unknown friend to whom I shall ever be grateful, and whom I shall ever love."

And the King pressed his hand cordially.

"And," he continued, with a bow to Monk, "an enemy whom I shall henceforth esteem at his proper value."

The Puritan's eyes flashed, but only once, and his face, lit up for an instant by that gleam, resumed its gloomy impassiveness.

"Well, M. d'Artagnan," Charles went on, "I will now tell you what was about to happen. The Comte de la Fère, with whom, I believe, you are acquainted, had started for Newcastle — "

"Athos?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes, I understand he is known by that appellation. The Comte de la Fère, then, had started for Newcastle, and would have probably induced the general to hold a conference with me or with some members of my party, when, as it appears, you interfered with the negotiation in this violent fashion."

"*Mordioux!*" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "then it must have been he who entered the camp the very evening that I came there with my fishermen — "

An almost imperceptible frown on the brow of Monk told D'Artagnan that his conjecture was correct.

"Yes, yes," he murmured, "I fancied there was something familiar in his appearance, something in his voice that came home to me. What an unfortunate wretch I am! Oh! Sire, forgive me! And yet I believed I was sailing before the wind all the time!"

"There is no harm done, monsieur," said the King, "except that the general accuses me of having laid a trap for him, which is not the case. No, general, I never reckoned on the employment of such weapons in your regard, as you will soon learn. Meanwhile, since I pledge you my honor as a gentleman, you will surely believe me, you must believe me, general. And now, M. d'Artagnan, a word with you."

"I listen on my knees, Sire."

"You are devoted to me, are you not?"

"Alas! too much so, as your Majesty sees!"

"I am satisfied. From a man like you one word is enough. Besides, you always back your words with deeds. General, be kind enough to follow us. Come along, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan, considerably surprised, obeyed at once. Charles

passed out, Monk followed Charles, and D'Artagnan followed Monk. Charles took the very path along which D'Artagnan had hurried to come to him. After a little the fresh sea-breeze fanned the cheeks of these nocturnal wayfarers, and about fifty yards from a little gate that had been opened by the King, they came to the downs, were face to face with the ocean which, now that the tide had ebbed, lay at rest along the shore like some weary monster. Charles II. advanced pensively, his head hanging down, and his hand beneath his cloak. Monk was close behind him, his arms at liberty, an anxious look in his eyes. Then came D'Artagnan, grasping the hilt of his sword.

"Where is the boat from which you landed, monsieur?" said Charles to the musketeer.

"Over there, Sire; you can see it, as there is a fire lit near it. Seven of my men and an officer are waiting for me in it."

"Ah, yes, I see it; it has been drawn up on the sand. But surely you did not come from Newcastle in such a cockboat as that?"

"No, Sire, I hired a felucca, which is now at anchor within a gunshot of the downs. It was in this felucca we made our voyage."

"General," said the King, turning to Monk, "you are free."

Notwithstanding his self-control, Monk could not keep back an exclamation.

The King nodded in confirmation of his statement, and continued:

"We will wake up a certain fisherman I know in the village; he will put to sea to-night, and land you at any point you desire. M. d'Artagnan, whom I place under the safeguard of your loyalty, will accompany you, general."

Monk uttered a murmur of surprise, and D'Artagnan fetched a heavy sigh. The King apparently took no notice of either of them, and knocked at the deal trellis in front of the cottage of the principal fisherman living on the downs.

"Holloa, Keyser," he shouted, "wake up!"

"Who calls?" inquired the fisherman.

"I, Charles, the King."

"Yes, yes, your Majesty," cried Keyser, turning out from the sail, which he had fashioned into a kind of hammock, "what can I do for you?"

"Captain Keyser," said Charles, "you must get under sail immediately; there is a gentleman here who will hire your boat and pay you well for it; you must do your very best for him."

And the King withdrew to some distance to leave Monk free to talk with the fisherman.

"I want to cross over to England," said Monk, who spoke Dutch enough to make himself understood.

"I'll be ready in a moment, sir," answered the skipper, "this very moment, if you like."

"But it will take some time to get ready, will it not?" said Monk.

"Not half an hour, sir. My eldest son is now getting under way, for we were to go fishing at three in the morning."

"Well, is the thing settled?" asked Charles, drawing near them.

"All but the price; yes, Sire," answered the fisherman.

"I'll see to that," said Charles; "this gentleman is my friend."

Monk started on hearing the last word.

"Very well, your Majesty," replied Keyser.

At this moment the echo of a horn, sounded by Keyser's eldest son, came to their ears from the beach.

"Time to start, gentlemen," said the King.

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "will your Majesty deign to grant me a few minutes' grace? I have some men in my employ, I am leaving them, and I should, at least, give them notice."

"Whistle to them," said Charles, with a smile.

D'Artagnan did as he was told, just at the moment when Captain Keyser was answering his son's signal. Four men came running up, with Menneville at their head.

"This is on account," said D'Artagnan, holding out a purse containing two thousand five hundred livres in gold. "You will go and wait for me in Calais, at the place you know of."

And D'Artagnan, with a profound sigh, dropped the purse into Menneville's hands.

"What! you are not leaving us?" cried the men.

"For a short time," said D'Artagnan, "though I may be away long enough, too, for all I know. But with the two thousand five hundred livres I am now giving you, and the two thousand five hundred you have already received, you

are paid in full according to our agreement. And now let us part, my good fellows."

"But the boat?"

"Don't let the boat trouble you."

"Our things are on board the felucca."

"Go and get them, and when you have done so, start on your journey."

"Very well, captain."

D'Artagnan went back to Monk and said:

"I am now at your orders, general, for we are to set out in company, unless you do not care for my society."

"Quite the contrary, monsieur," said Monk.

"Come, come, gentlemen; time to embark!" cried Keyser's son.

Charles made a gracious and dignified salutation to the general, saying:

"You will pardon me for this untoward incident and for the violence of which you have been the victim, when you are convinced that I am not the cause of either."

Monk made a profound inclination, but did not answer. Charles, on his side, was careful to avoid speaking to D'Artagnan in private, but he said aloud:

"I thank you, M. le Chevalier; you have my sincere thanks for your services. Only God can repay you for them, that God who, I hope, reserves trials and sorrows for me alone."

Monk followed Keyser and his son, and embarked with them.

D'Artagnan followed Monk, muttering:

"Ah, my poor Planchet! I am awfully afraid we have made a bad speculation!"

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH THE SHARES OF PLANCHET AND COMPANY RISE TO PAR.

During the passage Monk never spoke to D'Artagnan except in case of urgent necessity. Thus, when the Frenchman showed a good deal of reluctance about coming to breakfast — and a poor breakfast it was: salt fish, biscuit, and gin — Monk called him and said:

"Breakfast, monsieur!"

That was all. D'Artagnan, perhaps because he was himself so laconic on momentous occasions, feared this laconism of the general did not augur well for the result of his mission. Now, as he had a good deal of time on his hands, he spent it racking his brains in the endeavor to discover how it was that Athos had come across Charles II.; how it was that he had arranged with him to go to England; and how it was that he had entered the camp of Monk. And our poor lieutenant of musketeers tore a hair out of his mustache every time his mind reverted to the fact that the cavalier who had accompanied Monk the night of the abduction was Athos.

At last, after a voyage of two days and two nights, Captain Keyser anchored at the point for which Monk, who had taken entire direction during the passage, had ordered him to head. It was at the mouth of the little river near which Athos had taken lodgings.

The day was declining; a gorgeous sun, like a flaming shield of steel, was dipping the lower extremity of its disk under the blue line of the sea. The felucca was still under way, sailing up the river, which at this spot is rather wide; but Monk was impatient to go ashore, and Keyser landed him and D'Artagnan on the oozy and reedy river bank from his canoe.

D'Artagnan, obedient and resigned, followed Monk as a bear in chains follows his keeper. But he did not feel the humiliation of his position the less on that account, and he growled, under his breath, that serving kings brings bitterness in its train, and that even the best of kings is n't good for much.

Monk strode along at a rapid rate. It looked as if he were not yet quite sure of standing on English soil. They soon came in sight of the scattered cottages of the few fishermen and sailors who lived on the little quay belonging to this humble haven. Suddenly D'Artagnan cried:

"Eh! Why, bless my soul! there is a house over yonder on fire!"

Monk raised his eyes. Yes, beyond a doubt, and the fire was beginning to devour the house. A shed attached to it had first been burned, and the flames were now licking the roof. The fresh breeze was helping to aid the conflagration.

The two travellers hurried forward, heard great shouts, and, when nearer, saw soldiers brandishing their weapons and shaking their fists at the burning house. It was this menacing em-

ployment of theirs that had doubtless hindered them from signalling to the felucca.

Monk halted for a moment, and for the first time put his thoughts in words.

"What," he said, "if they were Lambert's soldiers, and not mine!"

D'Artagnan understood perfectly the tone of mingled grief, fear, and reproach in which the words were uttered. In fact, during the general's absence Lambert might have fought a battle, might have conquered and dispersed the hosts of the parliament, might have captured Monk's camp at a time when it was deprived of its firmest stay. But while Monk's doubts and fears affected D'Artagnan also, the musketeer found comfort in the following ratiocination:

"Of two things one must happen," he said to himself; "either Monk's surmise is correct, and all the people in the country are Lambertists, in other words, his enemies, and will receive me with open arms, for to me alone do they owe their victory; or things are as they were, and Monk will be so delighted at finding his camp just where it was that he won't be very unrelenting in seeking retaliation."

While thinking each his own thoughts, both travellers pushed ahead and soon found themselves in the midst of a band of sailors who were gazing sadly at the burning house, but who were too frightened by the threats of the soldiers to venture on any objection. Monk spoke to one of them.

"What does all this mean?" he said.

"Sir," answered the man, not recognizing that Monk, who was muffled up in his heavy cloak, was an officer, "there is a foreigner staying at the house and the soldiers suspect him of something or other. They tried to enter it, pretending they only wanted to bring him to the camp; but he was n't at all scared at their number, and threatened to kill the first man that attempted to cross the threshold, and when one of them risked it, the Frenchman levelled him with a shot from his pistol."

"Ah, so he 's a Frenchman, is he?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, rubbing his hands. "Good!"

"What! good?" repeated the fisherman.

"Oh, that is not — what I — meant — a mere slip of the tongue," stammered the musketeer. "But what happened next?"

"What happened next, sir? Why, his comrades grew as

savage as tigers; they must have fired over a hundred shots at the house; but the Frenchman was sheltered behind the wall, and every time one of them tried to enter by the door he was struck by a bullet fired by the Frenchman's servant, and he can shoot, I can tell you. Whenever a soldier threatened the window, crack went the Frenchman's pistol also. Look, there are seven men stretched on the ground."

"Ah! my brave fellow-countryman," cried D'Artagnan, "hold your ground! I'll be with you in a moment; we'll soon make a clean sweep of these vermin!"

"Stay, monsieur," said Monk, "wait a while."

"Long?"

"No, only long enough to ask a question."

Then turning to the sailor:

"Tell me, my good fellow," said he with an emotion which, in spite of his self-restraint, he was unable to conceal, "whose soldiers these are."

"And whose could they be except that lunatic Monk's?"

"There has been no battle, then?"

"A battle, indeed! What would be the use of one? Lambert's army is melting away like April snow. Officers and soldiers are all flocking to Monk. Lambert won't have fifty men in a week."

The fisherman was interrupted by another volley fired at the house, and by a pistol-shot in answer to the volley, which laid low the most daring of the assailants. The fury of the soldiers was now uncontrollable.

The fire was making greater progress than ever, and a column of flame and smoke was whirling and spreading over the roof. D'Artagnan could no longer restrain himself.

"*Mordioux!*" cried he, looking askance at Monk, "you are a general and you let your soldiers commit arson and murder! You look on quietly at all this and warm your hands at the blaze of the conflagration! *Mordioux!* you're no man!"

"Patience, monsieur, patience," said Monk, smiling.

"Patience! patience, until this gallant gentleman is roasted, I suppose?"

And D'Artagnan darted forward.

"Stop, monsieur," said Monk, imperiously.

And he advanced toward the house. Just at this moment an officer approached it and said to the besieged Frenchman:

"The house is on fire; in an hour you'll be burned to a

cinder! There is still a chance for you. Tell us all you know about General Monk, and we'll spare your life. Answer, or by Saint Patrick—"

The Frenchman did not answer; he was doubtless too busy reloading his pistol.

"We have sent for reinforcements," continued the officer, "and in a quarter of an hour there will be a hundred men round the house."

"My answer is," said the Frenchman, "that you must remove your men and leave me free to come out and go to the camp alone; if not, I prefer to be killed here!"

"God in Heaven!" cried D'Artagnan, "it is the voice of Athos. Ah, ruffians!"

And D'Artagnan's sword leaped from the scabbard.

Monk held him back and stopped also himself; then, in a ringing voice:

"Hello, Digby, what are you all doing here?" said he; "what is the meaning of this fire and all this uproar?"

"The general!" exclaimed Digby, dropping his sword.

"The general!" repeated the soldiers.

"Well, why should that astonish you?" said Monk, calmly.

Then, as soon as quiet was restored:

"I want to know," said he, "who lit that fire."

The soldiers hung their heads.

"What! I ask a question and there is no answer?" said Monk. "I find you doing wrong, and there are none ready to atone for their faults! Is not that house still burning?"

Then a score of soldiers scattered in search of buckets, pails, and jars, and set about extinguishing the fire with as much zeal, at least, as they had displayed in spreading it. But D'Artagnan, before any one moved, had already applied a ladder to the house, crying:

"Athos, it is I, D'Artagnan! Do not kill me, my dear friend!"

And, a few moments later, the count was in his arms.

Meanwhile Grimaud, with his customary serenity, had set to work dismantling the fortification he had erected on the ground floor. Then he opened the door, and stood quietly, with folded arms, upon the threshold. However, when he heard D'Artagnan's voice, he gave vent to a slight cry of surprise.

As soon as the fire was put out, the soldiers appeared before

Monk, with Digby at their head, all in a state of utter collapse.

"General," said Digby, "forgive us. What we have done was done because of our love for you, for we thought you were lost."

"You are mad, you fellows. Lost! Is a man like me ever lost? Am I not to be permitted to leave the camp when I choose to do so without taking you all into my confidence? Perhaps you take me for a London cockney? Must a gentleman who is my friend and my guest be besieged, assaulted, menaced with death, on account of a mere suspicion? God damn me if I don't have every one of you shot that this brave gentleman has left alive!"

"General," said Digby, piteously, "there were only twenty-eight of us, and look, eight of them are lying on the ground!"

"And I give the Comte de la Fère permission to send the twenty that are left to join the eight."

And he offered his hand to Athos.

"Back to the camp with the whole of you!" cried Monk. "Lieutenant Digby, consider yourself under arrest for a month."

"General —"

"That will teach you not to run counter to my orders another time."

"I had the colonel's, general."

"He had no authority to give any such orders, and if I find he commanded you to burn out this gentleman, he shall take your place."

"He did not do so, general; his orders were to conduct him to the camp; but the count refused to follow us."

"I refused to allow them to enter my house and pillage it," said Athos, looking significantly at Monk.

"And you acted rightly. Back to the camp, I say!"

The soldiers turned away, hanging their heads.

"Now that we are alone," said Monk to Athos, "have the goodness to tell me, monsieur, why you persisted in staying here, when you had your felucca —"

"I was waiting for you, general," answered Athos. "Did not your lordship make an appointment with me for the end of the week?"

The look of astonishment on D'Artagnan's face was too eloquent not to convince Monk, if he were not convinced already,

that these two brave and loyal men had no understanding in regard to his abduction.

"Monsieur," said he to D'Artagnan, "you were perfectly right. Please leave me for a few moments with M. le Comte de la Fère."

D'Artagnan profited by the permission to go and have a talk with Grimaud.

Monk requested Athos to show him into his chamber. The room was still filled with dust and rubbish. More than fifty balls had passed through the window, and the walls were in a very dilapidated condition. But there was a table and inkstand, and the writing materials were intact. Monk took a pen, wrote a single line, signed and folded the sheet, sealed the letter with his signet ring, and handed it to Athos, saying:

"Monsieur, you will please carry this letter to King Charles II.; start immediately if there is nothing to keep you here."

"And the barrels?" inquired Athos.

"The fishermen who brought me hither will help to transport them on board. I should like you to set out in an hour if you can do so."

"I can, general," said Athos.

"M. d'Artagnan!" cried Monk from the window.

D'Artagnan hurried upstairs.

"Embrace your friend and bid him good-bye, monsieur, for he is returning to Holland."

"To Holland!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "and what about me?"

"You are free to follow him, monsieur," replied Monk; "but I beg you to stay. Will you refuse me?"

"Oh, no, general, I am at your disposal."

D'Artagnan embraced Athos and had barely time to say farewell. Monk eyed them both intently. Then he attended personally to the preparations for his guest's departure, saw that the barrels were carried on board, and witnessed his embarkation. After all this was accomplished he took the arm of D'Artagnan, who was dazed with astonishment and emotion, and went on to Newcastle. On the way the musketeer, still holding the arm of Monk, murmured softly:

"Well, unless I am much mistaken, the shares of Planchet and Company are rising."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MONK DROPS THE MASK.

D'Artagnan had no very clear idea of the situation, although he flattered himself he would soon understand it. The voyage of Athos to England, the league between the latter and the King, and the singular fashion in which his own enterprise had got entangled with the count's, all afforded him subjects for very serious meditation. The best thing for him to do, however, was to let things take their course. He had acted imprudently, and, although he had succeeded to the full extent of his expectation, the result had not brought him a single one of the advantages that usually attend success. Well, since he had now lost everything, he no longer risked losing anything.

D'Artagnan followed Monk to the centre of the camp. The general's return had produced a marvellous effect, for the soldiers had given up the hope of ever seeing him again. But Monk, with his austere countenance and icy demeanor, looked as if he were inclined to ask his excited officers and exultant soldiers the cause of all this jubilation. To a lieutenant who advanced to meet him, and who spoke of the universal anxiety felt during his absence, he said:

"But why? Am I obliged to account to you for my actions?"

"But, my lord, when the shepherd is away, the sheep may well tremble."

"Tremble!" retorted Monk. "Ah, sir, what an expression! Damnation, man! if my sheep have not teeth and claws, I renounce being their shepherd — Upon my word! So you have been trembling, sir?"

"For you, general."

"Pray mind your own affairs. If I have not the genius God bestowed on Oliver Cromwell, I have whatever talent he bestowed on me, and, however small it may be, it satisfies me."

The officer did not answer, and his soldiers being reduced to silence in this fashion, they all believed that either he had accomplished some important undertaking or wanted to test their fidelity. But this was forming but a very poor conception of that very wary and patient intellect. If Monk were

as sincere as his puritanical brethren, he must have fervently thanked the patron saint that had rescued him from the box of M. d'Artagnan.

While these incidents were taking place, our musketeer never stopped repeating:

"God grant that Monk may not have as much self-esteem as I have! for I solemnly affirm that if any one had stuffed me into a coffer with a grating over my mouth, and had then carried me across the sea, boxed up in this style like a calf, the remembrance of my woebegone appearance in that same coffer and of the man who was instrumental in putting me into it would so stick in my gizzard — I should be in such dread of witnessing the flicker of a sarcastic smile on that malicious individual's lips, or a grotesque imitation of my position in the chest in every one of his attitudes — that, *mordioux!* I would plunge a neat little dagger into his throat by way of compensation for the grating, and would nail him down in a real coffin in memory of the imitation one in which I had mouldered for two entire days."

And D'Artagnan was perfectly sincere in his utterances, for he was a very thin-skinned personage, was our Gascon. Luckily, Monk looked at matters from a different point of view. He never said a word about the past to his timid conqueror; on the contrary, he made him a sharer of his labors, and took him with him on several reconnoitring expeditions, no doubt with a view to being reinstated in the good opinion of D'Artagnan, a consummation which he probably ardently desired. The musketeer proved that he was a master hand in the art of flattery. His admiration for Monk's tactics and for the ordering of his camp was boundless; he jested very pleasantly on the circumvallations of Lambert, "who," said he, "had uselessly given himself the trouble of enclosing a camp for twenty thousand men, when an acre and a half would be more than sufficient for the corporal and half a hundred or so of guards left to him before long."

As soon as Monk returned he accepted a proposal made by Lambert the evening before, a proposal rejected by his lieutenants on the ground that their leader was indisposed. The interview that took place in consequence was, however, neither long nor interesting. Lambert demanded a profession of faith from his rival, who replied that he had no opinion except that of the majority. Lambert asked whether it would not be

better to end their quarrel by an alliance rather than by a battle. Whereupon, Monk requested to be allowed a week for reflection. This Lambert was unable to refuse, and yet he had come thither with the avowed intention of devouring Monk and his army. The consequence was that when the interview, the result of which was watched impatiently by Lambert's soldiers, actually decided nothing, when there was to be neither treaty nor battle, the rebel army, as D'Artagnan had foreseen, began to perceive that the good cause was better than the bad one, and that the Parliament, though only a Rump, was better than General Lambert, with his futile ostentation and ambition.

Moreover, the bounteous repasts and the lavish profusion of beer and wine wherewith the good citizens of London used to regale their cherished soldiers were remembered longingly, while the black bread of their commissariat and the muddy water of the Tweed, too salty for drinking and not salty enough for cooking, were regarded with disgust and terror. No wonder Lambert's men were often heard saying: "Why should n't we go over to the other side? They 're keeping the roast beef warm for Monk in London, you may be sure."

From that moment the only talk in Lambert's army was of desertion. The soldiers, too, were affected by the influence of principle, which, like discipline, is one of the potent forces in keeping a body, constituted for any special object, together. Now, Monk defended the parliament, Lambert attacked it. Monk really cared as little for the parliament as Lambert, but its name was inscribed on his flag, and all those of the opposing party were forced to write on theirs "Rebellion," a word odious to Puritan ears. So they flocked from Lambert to Monk, as sinners flock from Baal to God.

Monk made his calculations: at a thousand desertions per day Lambert might last twenty days. But when a building is shaky, the combined forces of gravity and velocity accelerate its fall: the first day, a hundred abandoned the republican leader; the second, five hundred; the third, a thousand. Monk thought the latter would henceforth be the average. But the desertions quickly increased to two thousand, to four thousand, and, a week later, Lambert, seeing that he could no longer either accept or offer battle, prudently decamped during the night, purposing to return to London and forestall Monk in the creation of an army out of the remnants of the military party.

Monk, however, who was now perfectly free from anxiety, marched in triumph to London, augmenting his army from all the disaffected elements he met on his way. He pitched his camp at Barnet, a town about twelve miles from London. He was now the darling of the parliament, which regarded him as its protector, and eagerly expected by the Londoners, who longed to see him drop his mask and give them a chance of seeing him as he was. Even D'Artagnan himself could not understand his tactics, though he observed and admired them. Still, it was a foregone conclusion with Monk that, at present, he could not enter the city without incurring the risk of a civil war. He temporized for a time.

Suddenly, and to the entire surprise of everybody, Monk drove the military party out of London, and by order of the parliament, took up his quarters among the citizens. Then, just when the cockneys were beginning to cry out against him, and the soldiers to revile him, Monk, assured that he had the majority on his side, declared that the Rump Parliament must be dissolved, must abdicate its functions, must give place to a government which, at least, would not be a mockery. Monk's proclamation, backed by fifty thousand swords, was received on that very evening with howls of delirious joy by the half a million or so of inhabitants who peopled London.

And finally, when, after their uproarious triumph, orgies, and debaucheries in the open streets, they tried to learn the name of the master they were about to give themselves, they were informed that a vessel had just sailed from the Hague, bearing Charles II. and his fortunes.

"Gentlemen," said Monk to his officers, "I am going to meet our legitimate King. Let him who loves me follow me!"

A thunderous roar of applause greeted these words, words which D'Artagnan heard with a thrill of joy.

"*Mordioux!*" said he to Monk, "that is a bold game, general."

"You come with me, do you not?" asked Monk.

"I should say I do! But please tell me, general, what did you write when you were alone with Athos — I mean, Comte de la Fère, on the day — you know — we — arrived?"

"I have no secrets from you now," replied Monk; "I wrote these words: '*Sire, I expect your Majesty in six weeks at Dover.*'"

"Ah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "it was not only a bold game, but it was finely played. It was a stroke of genius!"

"You know something yourself about 'strokes of genius,'" was Monk's rejoinder.

It was the only allusion the general ever made to that voyage of his to Holland.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH ATHOS AND D'ARTAGNAN MEET AGAIN AT BEDFORD'S STAGHORN TAVERN.

The King of England entered Dover with great pomp, as he afterward did London. He had sent for his brothers, and brought over his mother and sister. England had been so long at the mercy of her own sweet will, that is to say, at the mercy of tyranny, mediocrity, and foolishness, that the return of the King, whom, however, the English only knew as the son of a man whose head they had cut off, was an excuse for every sort of revelry throughout the three kingdoms. Indeed, the rejoicings, the thunders of applause that hailed his advent made such an impression on the young prince that he whispered in the ear of his younger brother, James of York:

"In good sooth, James, it must have been our own fault that kept us away so long from subjects who love us so much."

The procession was magnificent. The fine weather added to the beauty of the ceremonies. Charles had regained all his gayety, all his good-humor; he seemed transfigured, and the hearts of all beneath him appeared to smile on him as did the sun.

Standing among a noisy crowd of adoring courtiers and loyalists, who seemed to have quite forgotten that they had conducted the new King's father to the scaffold, a man in the uniform of a lieutenant of musketeers was staring, with a smile on his thin, intelligent lips, now at the people, showering blessings on their prince, and now at the King, counterfeiting the most intense emotion, and bowing right and left, especially to the women, who were flinging bouquets under the feet of his horse.

"What a fine trade a king's is!" said this man, so carried

away and engrossed by his thoughts that he had halted in the middle of the road, and let half the procession pass him. "Yonder is a prince who is all over gold and diamonds, as much as Solomon ever was, enamelled with flowers like a meadow in the springtime; he will take money in handfuls from the overflowing coffers in which his now very leal — but, a while ago, anything but very leal — subjects have piled up a few wagon loads of gold ingots. At present they throw enough bouquets at him to bury him under a heap of flowers, and if he had appeared among them two months ago it is not flowers but bullets and balls they would have made him a present of. Undoubtedly, a great deal depends on the particular style in which you are born, with all due respect to those underlings who pretend they would as soon be born underlings as not."

The procession still moved along, but, with the passing of the King, the cheers were beginning to die away in the direction of the palace, which, however, did not save our musketeer from being shoved about in a very annoying fashion.

"*Mordioux!*" continued our logician, "these people trample on my toes, and evidently consider me of very little account, or rather, of no account at all, seeing that they are English and I am French. Yes, ask these folk: 'Who is D'Artagnan?' and they 'll answer: '*Nescio vos!*' But say to them: 'Look, there 's the King! Look, that 's Monk!' and they 'll yell: 'God save the King! Hurrah for Monk!' as long as their lungs hold out. And yet," he went on, eyeing the passing crowd with that look of his which was sometimes so keen and sometimes so haughty, "only just pause and reflect a little, my honest friends, on what Charles has done and on what Monk has done and on what a poor nobody named D'Artagnan has done! True, you don't know him, for he 's a stranger, and, perhaps, it 's that that keeps you from reflecting. But, bah! it 's of no consequence, after all. It does n't prevent Charles from being a great king, although he has been an exile for twelve years, nor Monk from being a great general, although he has made a trip to France in a box. And so, since it is acknowledged on all hands that Charles is a great king and Monk a great general, — Hurrah for King Charles II.! Hurrah for General Monk!"

And his voice mingled with a thousand other voices, soaring above them all for a moment, and, the better to emphasize

his enthusiastic devotion, he waved his hat in the air. Then, just in the middle of this fine outburst of loyalism, — for what is now called royalism was called loyalism in 1660, — some one seized his arm.

"Athos!" he cried, "you here!"

And the two friends embraced.

"You here!" repeated the musketeer, "and, if you're here, you can't be among the courtiers yonder, my dear count? What! You, who ought to be the hero of the day, you are not riding on his restored Majesty's left when General Monk is riding on his right? Really, I am as much at a loss to understand your temper as I am to understand that of the prince who owes you so much."

"As great a carper as ever, my dear D'Artagnan," said Athos. "Are you never going to get rid of that ugly defect?"

"For all you say, you are not taking any part in the procession, are you?"

"I do not do so, because I do not wish to do so."

"And why do you not wish to do so?"

"Because I am not either an ambassador, or envoy, or representative of the King of France, and I do not care to come so close to a king whom God has not appointed my master."

"*Mordioux!* you came pretty close to the King his father."

"It is different; that king was about to die."

"Still, all you have done for this one should — "

"What I did, I did because it was my duty, Besides, you are perfectly aware of my dislike for all ostentation. Now that King Charles has no further need of me, I hope he will leave me in repose and obscurity; that is all I ask of him."

D'Artagnan sighed.

"What ails you?" said Athos. "Why, it almost looks as though the King's happy return to London depressed you! and yet, my friend, you have done, at least, as much for his Majesty as I have."

"But," returned D'Artagnan, with his Gascon laugh, "has any one the slightest suspicion of how much I have done for his Majesty?"

"Oh, yes," cried Athos; "the King is quite aware of it, my friend."

"Is he, really?" answered the musketeer, bitterly. "By my faith, I never thought he was, and I was just trying to forget I ever met him."

"But he will not forget you, my friend, I can answer for that."

"You tell me so by way of consolation, Athos."

"Consolation for what?"

"*Mordioux!* for all the expenses I have incurred. I have ruined myself, my friend, ruined myself to restore yon young prince who passed a while ago on his prancing bay."

"The King does not know you are ruined, my friend, but he knows how much he owes you."

"Now, Athos, what good does that do me? Remember, I do you full justice. You have labored nobly. But still, although I apparently balked your plans, I was the real author of your success. Now follow me closely: with all your gentleness and persuasive power, you might not have won General Monk over; on the other hand, by the rough methods I adopted in dealing with that doughty warrior I gave the prince an opportunity of showing his generosity. That generosity was inspired by my lucky blunder, and Monk repaid Charles for it by restoring him to his throne."

"Everything you say, my friend, is the sober truth," answered Athos.

"Well, for all its truth, I 'll return to France, very much beloved by Monk, who calls me his 'dear captain,' though I am neither dear to him nor a captain, and very much appreciated by the King, who has already forgotten my name; for all its truth, I repeat, I shall return to my beautiful country, cursed by the soldiers I had enlisted by holding out to them the prospect of large pay, cursed by honest Planchet, from whom I borrowed a part of his fortune."

"What is that you are saying? How did Planchet come to be mixed up in this affair?"

"Oh, yes, my friend, General Monk fancies he has restored this spruce, smiling, worshipped King of yours; you fancy you have helped him; I fancy I have had a good deal to do with bringing him back; Charles II. fancies his return was due to his skilful diplomacy, and there is n't a bit of truth in any of these fancies: Charles II., King of England, Ireland, and Scotland has been seated on his throne by a French grocer, residing in the Rue des Lombards and answering to the name of Planchet. You see what greatness is! 'Vanity of vanities and all is vanity!' says the Scripture."

Athos had to laugh at his friend's sally.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, pressing his hand affectionately, "try and have a little more philosophy. Besides, surely it must be a source of some satisfaction to you that you saved my life by arriving so opportunely with Monk at the very moment when those infernal Puritans were going to burn me alive?"

"Come, now, my dear count, don't you think you just deserved that same burning the least bit in the world?" answered D'Artagnan.

"What! for saving King Charles's million?"

"What million?"

"Ah, true, you did not know about it; but you must not be angry with me, for the secret was not mine. The word 'REMEMBER!' which King Charles uttered on the scaffold — "

"Yes?"

"Meant: 'Remember that there is a million buried in the vaults of Newcastle Abbey, and that this million belongs to my son.'"

"Ah, yes, I understand. But what I understand also — and the knowledge is not at all pleasant — is that every time his Majesty King Charles II. thinks of me he will say to himself: 'That man very nearly made me lose my crown. But fortunately I was great, generous, marvellously self-possessed.' That will be the opinion held of me by the young gentleman who came to the Castle of Blois, in his threadbare black doublet and with his hat in his hand, to ask me would I be graciously pleased to allow him to see the King of France."

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried Athos, laying his hand on the musketeer's shoulder, "you are not just."

"I have some right not to be."

"No, for you are blind to the future."

D'Artagnan stared at his friend and then burst out laughing.

"In good sooth, my dear Athos," said he, "you are a master of fine phrases; your only rival in that respect is Cardinal Mazarin."

Athos made a gesture of annoyance.

"Excuse me," continued D'Artagnan, still laughing, "excuse me if I offend you. The future! what lovely words are those that hold a promise in them, and how admirably they fill your mouth when you have nothing else to put in it! However, *mordioux!* after running across so many promises, don't

you think it's time for me to meet with at least one performer — But let us drop it. What are you doing here, my dear Athos? Are you the King's treasurer?"

"The Kings's treasurer! What do you mean?"

"Yes, since the King has a million, he'll need a treasurer. Why, the King of France, who has n't a sou, still has a superintendent of his finances, M. Fouquet. True, to compensate for the King's poverty, the superintendent has a good round number of millions."

"Oh, our million was spent long ago," said Athos, laughing in turn.

"I see — muddled away in satins, velvets, jewelry, and feathers of all the colors of the rainbow. Well, these poor princes and princesses must have stood badly in need of tailors and milliners. By the way, Athos, do you remember what our accoutrements cost us for the La Rochelle campaign and for our entrance into the city afterward on horseback? Two or three thousand livres, faith! However, a king's bust has a more ample development, and it takes more stuff to cover it. But say, Athos, even if you're not treasurer, you surely stand well at court?"

"I pledge you my honor I don't know whether I do or not," answered Athos, simply.

"Oh, nonsense! you tell me you don't know?"

"Yes, I have not met the King since I saw him at Dover."

"Then he has forgotten you, too. *Mordioux!* how charming!"

"His Majesty is so busy!"

"Oh!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, with one of his expressive and comical grimaces, "upon my word, I find that ancient affection I used to have for Monsignor Giulio Mazarini is coming to life again! You tell me, my dear Athos, that the King has never seen you since?"

"Yes."

"And you are not furious?"

"I! and why, pray? Do you really imagine, my dear fellow, that it was for the King's sake I have acted as I have. I was not even acquainted with the young man. I defended his father, who represented a principle sacred in my eyes, and I was drawn to the son by my reverence for that same principle. You remember what a chivalrous knight, what a stainless gentleman, the father was?"

"True, a brave and honorable man, whose life was sad and whose death was noble."

"And now, my dear D'Artagnan, you may as well understand that just before the fatal stroke I pledged my solemn word to that King, that fearless hero, that friend of my soul, if I may venture to say so, that I should preserve faithfully the secret of a deposit which was to be delivered to his son whenever it was needed for his cause. This young man came to see me; he knew not that I could have other interest for him than that of recalling the memory of his father. Well, the promise I gave to Charles I., I have kept to Charles II., and that is the whole story. What does it matter to me whether he be grateful or ungrateful? By freeing myself from that responsibility I have done a greater service to myself than I have done to him."

"I always said," answered D'Artagnan with a sigh, "that disinterestedness was the noblest thing on earth."

"What, my dear friend!" replied Athos; "are you not in the same position that I am in? If I know the meaning of your words, this young man's misfortunes affected you also; and your deed was far finer than mine, for I had a duty to fulfil, while you were absolutely under no obligation to the son of the martyr King. You were under no obligation to pay for that precious drop of royal blood which fell upon my brow through the platform of the scaffold. Your deed was prompted by your heart alone; the noble and generous heart that beats under your seeming scepticism and sarcastic irony. You have compromised the fortune of a servant, and your own as well, my good-natured miser. Never mind; you wish, of course, to restore Planchet his money? That is easily understood; it does not become a gentleman to borrow from an inferior, except he is prepared to pay back principal and interest. Well, I will sell La Fère, if need be; or, if that is not required, some little farm or other. You'll pay Planchet, and there will be still enough grain left in our granaries to support us both, and Raoul also. In this fashion, my friend, you will be under no obligation to any one except yourself, and if I know you, you'll derive no small satisfaction from the thought that you can proudly say: 'I have made a King!' Am I not right?"

"Athos! Athos!" murmured D'Artagnan, dreamily, "I told you one day that whenever you preached a sermon I would go to hear you. On the day you tell me there is a hell, *mordioux!*

I'll begin to have a dread of the gridiron and the pitchforks. You are a better man than I am, or rather, a better man than any man alive. I don't know that I have a single good quality except one — I am not jealous. Leave out that merit, and, God damn me, as the English say, if I have n't every fault you could mention!"

"And I say that I do not know D'Artagnan's equal anywhere," replied Athos. "But here we are at my lodgings, almost without perceiving it. Will you not please to come in, my friend?"

"Eh! Why, it is Bedford's Staghorn Tavern, if my eyes don't deceive me!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"I confess, my friend, that is the very reason why I am staying at it. I like old acquaintances, and I like to sit down on the very chair on which I sank utterly exhausted and utterly hopeless, after your return on that night of the 31st of January."

"After discovering the abode of the masked headsman? Yes, that was an awful day —"

"Come in, then," said Athos, interrupting him.

They entered an apartment which had formerly been the common hall. The tavern in general, and this room in particular, had undergone important changes. The former host of the musketeers, having become tolerably wealthy for an innkeeper, had closed the shop and had transformed the hall of which we are speaking into a warehouse for colonial imports. As for the rest of the house, he let it ready furnished to strangers.

It was with feelings of unutterable emotion that D'Artagnan recognized the several pieces of furniture in this chamber on the first story — the wainscoting and hangings, and even the map that Porthos used to study so zealously in his leisure hours.

"It 's eleven years ago!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "*Mordioux!* it looks to me as if it were a century!"

"And to me as if it were only a day!" replied Athos. "So you can imagine, my dear friend, the joy I experience in thinking that you are with me here again; that I can hold your hand, can lay aside sword and dagger, and can share with you this bottle of sherry without misgiving. And, oh! would not my joy be beyond the power of words to express if our two friends were there, at the two corners of this table,

and if my darling Raoul stood upon the threshold, gazing at us with his large eyes, at once so sparkling and so tender!"

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, deeply affected, "it is very true, and I appreciate your opening words especially. It is pleasant to be able to smile where we had such good reason to shudder, expecting, as we did every moment, to see Mordaunt appear on the landing."

At that instant the door opened, and D'Artagnan, brave as he was, could not repress a slight tendency to be somewhat alarmed.

Athos noticed, and smiled.

"It is only our host," said he; "he has a letter with him."

"Yes, sir;" said the host. "I bring a letter for your honor."

"Thanks," replied Athos, taking the letter without looking at it. "Tell me, my friend, do you recognize this gentleman?"

The old man raised his head and fixed his eyes on D'Artagnan.

"No," said he.

"He is one of those friends I talked to you about, who was staying here with me eleven years ago."

"Oh," replied the old man, "so many strangers pass through here!"

"But we were lodging here on the 30th of January, 1641," added Athos, thinking that this information would stimulate his host's torpid memory.

"That 's possible," he answered, smiling, "but it 's so long ago!"

And he bowed himself out.

"By-by, old graybeard!" said D'Artagnan. "And now, my friend, accomplish your deeds of high emprise; revolutionize kingdoms, carve your name on stone or bronze with your stout sword; there is something more rebellious, adamantine, and oblivious than steel, or bronze, or stone — it is the aged cranium of the hotel-keeper who has grown rich in his business. He did not recognize me! Well, I should have recognized him anywhere."

Athos, with a smile, opened the letter.

"Ah!" said he, "a letter from Parry."

"Indeed!" returned D'Artagnan. "Read it, my friend, read it at once; it must contain news."

Athos shook his head and read:

"*M. le Comte:*

"*The King regrets exceedingly that you were not beside him to-day during his solemn entry. His Majesty has ordered me to write to you and to recall him to your memory. His Majesty will expect you to-night between nine and eleven.*

"*I am, with great respect, M. le Comte,*

"*Your very humble and obedient servant,*

"*Parry.*"

"You see, my dear D'Artagnan, we must never despair of the hearts of kings," said Athos.

"*You* need not despair of their hearts — you are right enough there," rejoined D'Artagnan.

"Oh, my dear friend, the very dearest of my friends," exclaimed Athos, who had noticed a slight tinge of bitterness in D'Artagnan's tone, "forgive me. Have I unintentionally wounded the most valued of all my comrades?"

"You must be losing your senses, Athos, and so I'll guide you to the palace — only to the gate, though — the walk will do me good."

"You must enter along with me, my friend; I will speak to his Majesty —"

"Oh, nonsense! you must do no such thing," answered D'Artagnan, with a self-respecting pride in which there was no alloy. "I think if there is anything more degrading than begging yourself, it is getting another to beg for you. And now let us start, my friend, we'll have a very pleasant stroll; I'll show you the house of General Monk on our way; you know I'm staying with him, and a fine house it is, by my faith! Are you aware that an English general enjoys a larger income than a French marshal?"

Athos went along with his friend, quite depressed by D'Artagnan's affected cheerfulness.

All the city was in a state of uproarious gayety; the two friends were jostled every moment by drunken enthusiasts, who insisted on making them shout: "God save our good King Charles!" D'Artagnan's response was a growl, that of Athos a smile. In this fashion they made their way to Monk's house, which, as we have implied, it was necessary to pass in going to the palace of St. James.

Athos and D'Artagnan had spoken very little so far, doubt-

less because they would have had so much to say to each other if they had spoken at all. Moreover, Athos feared that if he talked he might give vent to the satisfaction he really experienced, and so hurt his friend's feelings, while D'Artagnan dreaded he might let some word escape him the bitterness of which would be a cause of pain to Athos. And so there was as it were a queer sort of rivalry between contentment and ill humor for the prize of silence. D'Artagnan was the first to be conquered by that itch for bandying words wherewith the tip of his tongue was habitually afflicted.

"Do you remember the passage in 'D'Aubigné's Memoirs,' Athos," said he, "in which that devoted servitor, who, by the way, was a Gascon like myself, as poor, and I was almost near saying as brave as myself, speaks of the niggardly habits of Henri IV.? though I remember my father telling me that D'Aubigné was a liar. Now when you examine the princes of his race closely, do you not find that they are all chips of the old block?"

"Don't talk nonsense, D'Artagnan. The kings of France misers! You must be going crazy, my friend."

"Oh, you never see any faults in others, you are so perfect yourself. But, for all that, Henry IV. was a skinflint, and his son Louis XIII. was another. We have some reason for saying so, haven't we? In Gaston the vice has attained abnormal proportions, and he is hated on account of it by every one in his neighborhood. Henrietta, poor woman, might well be forgiven for being close-fisted, she who did not eat every day, and did not have a chance to warm herself every year; however, her parsimonious habits have been imitated by her son Charles II., who is the grandson of Henri IV., and quite as stingy as his mother and grandfather. Come, now, haven't I made out a fair genealogical record for our misers?"

"D'Artagnan, my friend, are you not rather uncivil to that eagle race known by the name of Bourbon?"

"Ah! and I was forgetting the finest fellow of them all! — that other grandson of the Béarnais, Louis XIV., my late master. I hope you are not going to say that he is not a miser, the man who refused to lend a million to his brother Charles! Capital! I see now I have made you angry. It's lucky for me we're near my house, or rather, my friend General Monk's."

"My dear D'Artagnan, you do not anger me, you sadden

me. It is, in fact, deplorable that a man of your merit should not have won the position to which his services surely entitle him; it is my firm belief, my dear friend, that there is no more glorious name in war and diplomacy than yours. Have the services of the Luynes, the Bellegardes, and the Bassompierres conferred on them the same right to fortune and honors that our services have conferred on us? You are right, my friend, a hundred times right."

D'Artagnan sighed, and, advancing a little ahead of his friend into the porch of the mansion inhabited by Monk at the edge of the city:

"Allow me to leave my purse in my room," said he, "for the London pickpockets are even more skilful than those of Paris, and if I were robbed in the crowd of the few crowns left me, I should not be able to return to France. Now, though I had no objection to quitting France, the thought of returning to it drives me wild with joy, for all the prejudices I formerly entertained against England have come back to me, and a good many more besides."

Athos made no reply.

"Just a moment, my dear friend," continued D'Artagnan, "and I am with you. I am well aware you are in a hurry to go yonder to receive your reward; but you may rest assured that I am in quite as great a hurry to share your joy — although from a distance. Wait for me, then."

And D'Artagnan was already near the end of the vestibule when a man, half servant, half soldier, who filled in Monk's establishment the twofold office of porter and guard, stopped the musketeer and said in English:

"Excuse me, sir —"

"Eh!" answered D'Artagnan, "what is the matter? Is the general going to send me away from his house? To be expelled by him would be the finishing stroke!"

As these words were spoken in French, they did not make any impression on the person addressed, who himself spoke a mixture of English and uncouth Scotch. But Athos, who heard them, was deeply pained, for he began to fear that D'Artagnan's surmise was correct.

The Englishman showed a letter to D'Artagnan.

"From the general," said he.

"Oh, I see it plain enough; my dismissal, of course. Ought I to read it, Athos?"

"You may be mistaken," answered Athos; "if you are not, then the only honest people in the world are you and myself."

D'Artagnan opened the letter, shrugging his shoulders, and the phlegmatic Englishman brought a big lantern close to him to enable him to read it.

"Well, what is said in it?" asked Athos, who saw a sudden transformation in the aspect of the reader.

"There, read it yourself," said the musketeer.

Athos took the paper and read:

"M. d'Artagnan: The King was very sorry that you did not go to St. Paul's along with the procession. His Majesty says that he missed you very much, and, indeed, I missed you too, my dear captain. There is only one way in which you can repair your fault. His Majesty expects you to be present at nine at the palace of St. James; will you try to be there at the same time that I am? His Majesty appoints that hour for the audience which he is graciously pleased to grant you."

The letter was from Monk.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE AUDIENCE.

"Well?" asked Athos, in a mildly reproachful tone, when D'Artagnan had read the letter addressed to him by Monk.

"Well?" repeated D'Artagnan, flushing with pleasure and also a little ashamed of having been in such a hurry to accuse the King and Monk; "it 's a mere courtesy — and may lead to nothing, it is true — still it is a courtesy."

"I could not bring myself to believe that the young prince was ungrateful," said Athos.

"Well," replied D'Artagnan, "his present success is too near his past failures for him to forget all at once; but until now everything proved I was right."

"It did, my dear friend, it did. Ah, you are beginning to look yourself again. I cannot tell you how delighted I am!"

"See here — Charles receives General Monk at nine, and will receive me at ten. Do you think he will receive me in one of those public audiences at which you are beguiled with

empty promises, court holy water, as we used to say at the Louvre? Well, if it be, we may as well get there in any case, and place our heads under the spout."

Athos made no reply, and both hurried on to the Palace of St. James, which was surrounded by crowds, eager to catch a glimpse of the courtiers and of the King's own royal person through the windows. It was striking eight when the two friends entered the gallery, already thronged with courtiers and petitioners, who all examined curiously the plain, foreign-looking garb of the strangers, and the faces that were stamped with such an air of exceptional distinction. On the other hand, Athos and D'Artagnan, who had quickly taken the measure of the whole assembly, resumed their conversation.

Suddenly a great noise was heard at the end of the gallery; it was caused by the entrance of General Monk, followed by more than a score of officers, each trying to bask in the smiles of the great captain who had been on the previous evening England's master. No one doubted that a glorious future was to be the portion of the restorer of the Stuarts.

"Gentlemen," said Monk, turning aside, "have the goodness to remember that I have no longer any influence. Lately I commanded the principal army of the Commonwealth; that army is now the King's, and I am, in pursuance of his Majesty's orders, about to surrender into his hands the authority I held until yesterday."

Astonishment was depicted on every countenance, and the throng of admirers and suppliants that had encircled Monk a moment before gradually widened and was finally lost in the undulating crowds. Monk had to wait for an audience like everybody else. D'Artagnan brought this circumstance under the notice of the Comte de la Fère, who frowned. Suddenly, however, the door of the young King's study was flung open, and Charles advanced, preceded by officers of his household.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he. "Is General Monk here?"

"Yes, Sire," answered the old general.

Charles hurried up to him and took both his hands in his with the warmest demonstrations of friendship.

"General," said the King, in a loud voice, "I have just signed your patent; you are now Duke of Albemarle, and it is my intention that, as no one in my kingdom has equalled you in loyalty, valor, and genius, except the noble Montrose, so no

one shall in the future equal you in rank and fortune. Gentlemen, the duke is commander-in-chief of our armies by land and sea; you will please to render him due honor in that capacity."

While every one was showing his eagerness to be the first to offer the general his congratulations, which he received with his usual composure, D'Artagnan said to Athos:

"To think that this dukedom and commander-in-chieftancy and all these grandeurs could have been contained in a box six feet long and three feet wide!"

"Grandeurs far more transcendent are contained in boxes that are much smaller, my friend, with this difference, — that they never get out of them!" replied Athos.

Suddenly Monk's eyes lighted on the two gentlemen, who were standing aside, waiting for the ebb of the tide. He elbowed his way to them and surprised them in the midst of their philosophic reflections.

"You were speaking of me?" said he with a smile.

"And of God also, my lord duke," answered Athos.

After reflecting a moment, Monk rejoined gayly:

"Well, gentlemen, we 'll now speak a little of the King, if you have no objection; you are, I think, to have an audience with his Majesty."

"At nine," said Athos.

"At ten," said D'Artagnan.

"Then let us enter the King's study," replied Monk, making a sign to his two companions to go before him, an honor they both declined.

During the polite debate that followed — so characteristically French — the King had returned to the centre of the gallery.

"Ah! My Frenchmen!" said he, in that tone of careless gayety which he had never lost amid all his crosses and troubles. "I have always taken pleasure in the society of Frenchmen!"

Athos and D'Artagnan bowed.

"Duke, conduct these gentlemen into my study. I will be with you immediately, gentlemen," he added in French.

And he promptly dismissed his court, so that he might return to his "Frenchmen," as he styled them.

"M. d'Artagnan," said he, on entering his study, "I am very glad to see you again."

"Sire," answered the musketeer, "my joy at being able to

salute your Majesty in your own Palace of St. James is beyond the power of words to express."

"Monsieur, you have rendered me a very great service, for which I owe you the deepest gratitude. Did I not fear to encroach on the rights of our commander-in-chief, I would offer you some post worthy of your acceptance near our own person."

"Sire," answered D'Artagnan, "when I quitted the service of the King of France, I promised my sovereign that I would never take service under another monarch."

"Well, I am really sorry to hear it, I should have liked to do a good deal for you — you please me."

"Sire — "

"Come, now," said Charles, with a smile, "could I not prevail upon you to break your word? Duke, give me your help. Suppose you were offered, or, in short, supposing I offered you the command of my musketeers?"

D'Artagnan bowed lower than before.

"I should still be under the necessity of refusing your Majesty's gracious offer," said he. "A gentleman has but his word, and mine, as I have had the honor of telling your Majesty, is pledged to the King of France."

"Then we 'll drop the subject," said the King, turning to Athos.

And he left D'Artagnan in all the agonies of disappointment.

"Ah! I was a true prophet," murmured the musketeer; "words, empty promises, court holy water! Kings have a natural genius for offering you just the very thing they know you can't accept, and for discharging their debts by a parade of such cheap generosity. Fool! Triple fool that I was to have entertained even a moment's hope!"

During this time Charles had taken the hand of Athos.

"Count," said he, "you have been to me a second father; you have rendered me one of those services that can never be repaid. Still, I have been racking my brains to find out some way of showing my appreciation of your merits. My father made you a Knight of the Garter — an order not every king in Europe is entitled to wear. The queen mother made you a Knight of the Holy Ghost — an order equally illustrious. To these I wish to add the Golden Fleece, just sent me by the King of France, to whom the King of Spain, his father-in-law, had given two on the occasion of the marriage. I have a service to ask of you, however, in return."

"Sire," said Athos, taken completely by surprise, "the Golden Fleece for me! Why, the King of France is the only person in my native country to enjoy that distinction!"

"I am desirous that you should be the equal of any one in your native country who has been honored by the favor of his sovereign," said Charles, taking the chain from his neck, "and I am sure, count, that my father smiles from the depths of his tomb upon what I am now doing."

"It is all very strange," muttered D'Artagnan, while his friend received, kneeling, the eminent order the King was conferring on him, "nay, it is incredible! I have seen honors and riches falling in showers upon all the friends around me, and never a drop coming my way! It's lucky I am not jealous; if I were, I should be tearing my hair out in handfuls, you may take my word for it!"

Athos rose, and Charles embraced him affectionately.

"General," said he to Monk.

Then pausing, with a smile:

"Excuse me," he continued, "I meant duke. You see I made the mistake because 'duke' is such a short word. I should like you to have a more lengthy title — I should like you, indeed, to stand so close to my throne that I could address you as I do Louis XIV., and call you my brother. But I have managed matters so that you will be almost my brother, for I appoint you viceroy of Ireland and Scotland, my dear duke. And so, when I speak to you in future, I shall not be so apt to make a mistake."

The duke took the King's hand, but with the sobriety and absence of enthusiasm that marked all his actions. Still, his heart was stirred by this last favor. Charles, by skilfully husbanding his generosity, had left ample scope for the general's ambitions, but this favor transcended even his ambitions.

"*Mordioux!*" growled D'Artagnan, "it 's beginning to rain again. Oh! it 's enough to drive a man crazy!"

And he turned away, looking so comically doleful and woebegone that the King could not repress a smile.

Monk prepared to take leave of Charles and pass out of the study.

"You 're not going, my trusty friend, are you?" asked the King.

"If your Majesty permit. I am really very tired; the emotions incident to the day have worn me out, and I need repose."

"But surely, you're not starting without taking M. d'Artagnan along with you?"

"Why not, Sire?" said the old warrior.

"Oh, you know very well yourself why."

Monk stared at Charles in amazement.

"Your Majesty will pardon me," said he, "but I do not really know what you mean."

"Yes, that's possible. But, though you forget, M. d'Artagnan does n't."

The musketeer looked as astonished as the general.

"Come, now, duke," said the King, "are you not lodging with M. d'Artagnan?"

"M. d'Artagnan does me the honor, Sire, of lodging with me."

"And you offered to lodge him of your own accord, did you?"

"Of my own accord, yes, Sire."

"Yes, but you could not help it. It is the conqueror who houses the prisoner, and so it is you who are lodging with M. d'Artagnan."

Monk reddened.

"Ah, yes, quite true," said he, "I am D'Artagnan's prisoner."

"To be sure you are, Monk, since you have not yet been ransomed. But don't be uneasy, I will pay your ransom. I took you away from him, so it 's only fair."

D'Artagnan's eyes now sparkled with all their customary cheerfulness; the Gascon was beginning to understand. Charles came up to him.

"The general is not wealthy," said he, "and could never pay you his full value. I am, certainly, richer; but now that he is a duke, and if not a king, the next best thing to it, his value has so enormously increased that I 'm afraid I may not be able to pay it, either. Come, now, M. d'Artagnan, you won't be too hard on me? How much do I owe you?"

D'Artagnan, though enchanted at the turn things had taken, answered with perfect self-possession:

"Sire, your Majesty need not be alarmed. When I had the good fortune to capture his grace, he was only a general; a general's ransom is, therefore, all that is due me. But if the general condescend to give me up his sword, I 'll consider him no longer my debtor, for the only thing in the world of at all the same value as the general is his sword."

"Odds-fish! as my father used to say, a gallant proposal and a gallant man, don't you think so, duke?"

"Upon my honor, Sire, I do!" answered the duke.

And he drew his sword.

"Monsieur," said he to D'Artagnan, "here is what you have asked. Many a man has wielded a better blade; but, modest as mine may be, you are the first man to whom it ever was surrendered."

D'Artagnan felt a certain elation when he grasped the sword that had made a king.

"Odzookens!" cried Charles, "what does this mean? a sword that restored me my throne to pass out of my realm and never figure among my regalia, as it should, some day or other? No, upon my soul, that shall not be! Captain d'Artagnan, I offer you two hundred thousand livres, in French money, for that sword: if you think it too little, say so."

"It is too little, Sire," answered D'Artagnan, with inimitable gravity. "In the first place, I would rather not sell it at all; but a wish expressed by your Majesty is a command, and, therefore, I obey. However, the respect due to the illustrious warrior who is listening to me compels me to estimate at a third more this gauge of my victory. I must, then, ask three hundred thousand livres for the sword, or else give it to your Majesty for nothing."

And taking it by the point, he presented it to the King.

Charles II. burst into roars.

"A brave man and a pleasant companion! is n't he, duke? is n't he, count? Odds-fish! he pleases me and I like him. Here, Chevalier d'Artagnan," said he, "wait till I give you this."

And going to the table he took up a pen and wrote an order on his treasurer for a sum equivalent to three hundred thousand livres.

When D'Artagnan had it in his hand he turned gravely to Monk:

"I know I asked too little," said he, "but avarice is a vice I would rather die, I assure your grace, than be guilty of."

The King laughed again as freely as if he were the happiest cockney in his kingdom.

"Come and see me before you depart, chevalier," said he; "I 'll need to lay up a store of gayety against the time when my Frenchmen leave me."

"And, Sire, that gayety won't be like the duke's sword — I'll give it to your Majesty for nothing," answered D'Artagnan, whose exultation was so great that his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

"And count," added Charles, turning to Athos, "come to see me also. I have an important message to give you. Your hand, duke."

Monk pressed the King's hand.

"Adieu, gentlemen," said Charles, giving a hand to each of the Frenchmen, who carried them to their lips.

"Well," asked Athos, when they were outside, "are you satisfied?"

"Hush!" answered D'Artagnan, wild with joy, "I have not seen the treasurer yet. The spout may fall on my head."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SHOWS HOW RICHES MAY BE AN INCUMBRANCE.

D'Artagnan did not waste his time, and when the proper moment arrived he paid a visit to his Majesty's lord high treasurer.

He had then the satisfaction of exchanging a bit of paper, covered with a wretched scrawl, for a prodigious number of crowns recently stamped with the effigy of his most gracious Majesty Charles II.

Though D'Artagnan usually had perfect mastery over himself, yet, on the present occasion, he could not keep his exultation within bounds, a state of mind the reader will, perhaps, comprehend, if he be only inclined to make some allowance for a man who had never, since he was born, seen so many coins and rolls of gold pieces arranged side by side in an order it was truly pleasant to behold.

The treasurer stowed away all these rolls in bags, and stamped the arms of England on every bag, a favor treasurers do not grant to everybody.

Then he said to D'Artagnan, with great composure, but with the politeness that was due to a man honored by the King's friendship:

"Take away your money, sir."

"Your money!" Such a thrill as the words sent through every fibre of D'Artagnan's heart he had never felt before.

He loaded a little cart with the bags and returned home in a state of profound meditation. A man who owns three hundred thousand livres can no longer boast of an unwrinkled brow: a furrow for every hundred thousand is not excessive.

D'Artagnan shut himself in, did not dine, refused admittance to every caller, and with lamp lighted and loaded pistol on the table, he watched during the night, thinking out a method whereby he might prevent these lovely crowns, which had passed from the royal coffers into his, from passing again into the pockets of some freebooter.

The only means he could discover was to lock his treasure up for a time under locks so solid that no wrist could break them, and so complicated that no ordinary key could open them.

The Gascon remembered that the English are adepts in all sorts of mechanical and commercial inventions; so he resolved to go in search of a mechanician and purchase a safe.

He had not to go far. Mr. Will Jobson, doing business in Piccadilly, listened to his suggestions, sympathized with his fears, and promised to make him a safety lock that should relieve him from all future apprehensions.

"I will," said he, "construct a piece of mechanism for you that is quite new. At the first serious attempt made on your lock, an invisible disk will separate into two parts, and a little barrel, equally invisible, will vomit forth a tiny little copper bullet that will lay the intruder flat and make considerable noise also. What do you think of that?"

"Nothing could be more ingenious," cried D'Artagnan, "the little copper bullet especially. And now for your terms."

"I must have a fortnight to work on it and fifteen thousand livres on delivery."

D'Artagnan frowned. Why, with the number of thieves that there were in London, the probability was that at the end of the fortnight he might not need any mechanical contrivance to protect his vanished property. Besides, fifteen thousand livres was a rather stiff amount to pay for securing what, with due watchfulness, he could himself secure at no cost at all.

"I will reflect," said he; "thank you, sir."

And he fairly ran the rest of the way home; but nobody had as yet been near his treasure.

Athos paid a visit to his friend in the course of the day; he found him so troubled that he could not conceal his amazement.

"How is this?" said he; "rich and not cheerful! Why, is not wealth the very thing you longed for most?"

"My friend, the pleasures you're not used to are really more annoying than the vexations to which you are. And now a little advice from you, if you please. You can give it, for you always have had money. When a fellow has money, what ought he to do with it?"

"That depends."

"What have you done with yours? How is it you have managed to be neither a miser nor a spendthrift? Avarice dries up the heart, prodigality melts it into water."

"Fabricius himself never uttered a profounder truth. But, in fact, my money has never given me any trouble."

"Oh, I see. You have it out at interest?"

"No; you are aware that I possess a rather fine mansion, and that, indeed, it forms the most valuable part of my property."

"Yes."

"So that you can become as rich as I am, richer, if you like, in the same way."

"But you hide away your income somewhere?"

"No, I don't."

"What do you think of constructing a hiding-place in a wall?"

"I never did such a thing myself."

"Then you must lodge it with some safe, trustworthy man of business, who pays you a fair rate of interest."

"Wrong again."

"Then, in God's name, what do you do with it?"

"I spend what I have, and I have only enough for my expenditure, my dear D'Artagnan."

"Oh, I understand. But you are a great lord, and an income of fifteen thousand livres slips through your fingers easily. And then you have certain duties to fulfil and you must cut a figure in the world suitable to your station."

"Why, my friend, from all I can see, you are quite as great a lord as I am, and this money of yours will enable you to support your position adequately."

"Three hundred thousand livres! I must put away the two-thirds of it, for I don't need them."

"Excuse me, but I think you said, — or I fancy I heard you say, — in short, I was under the impression you had a partner."

"Ah, *mordioux!* you're right!" cried D'Artagnan, reddening. "Planchet! I had forgotten Planchet, I give you my word! Well, there's my hundred thousand livres gone up in smoke — Ah! what a pity — it was a nice round sum and had a pleasant sound. You're right, Athos, I am not rich at all. Humph! what a memory you have!"

"Yes, thank God, it is still rather retentive."

"That honest Planchet of mine," growled D'Artagnan, "is not going to make a bad thing out of his speculation. Well, hang it, a bargain, I suppose, is a bargain."

"How much are you going to give him?"

"Oh," returned D'Artagnan, "he's not a bad fellow, and I can easily settle matters with him. You see I have met with some misfortunes, have been at great expense, and all that will have to be considered in the winding up of our accounts."

"My dear friend," said Athos, tranquilly, "I know you, and I have no fears for honest Planchet; his interests are safer in your hands than they could be in mine. But as you have no further business to transact in London, don't you think it advisable to return at once? You will go and thank his Majesty, ask if he has any orders for you, and in six days we shall get a glimpse of the towers of Notre Dame."

"My dear friend, I am actually wild to be off; and I'll go and present my respects to the King at once."

"I have to call on certain persons in the city, but, after I do so, I am at your service," said Athos.

"Will you lend me Grimaud?"

"With all my heart. What do you want him for?"

"Oh, for something very simple and easy. I want him to have an eye to my pistols; they're on the table there, close to my coffers."

"As you like," replied Athos, placidly.

"And he won't leave the room?"

"No more than the pistols themselves."

"Then I'm off to see his Majesty. Good-bye."

When D'Artagnan entered the Palace of St. James, Charles II. was busy with his correspondence, and our musketeer had to dance attendance for a full hour.

While striding up and down the gallery, from the windows to the doors, and from the doors to the windows, he fancied he saw

a cloak like the one worn by Athos passing through a vestibule; but when he was going to find out whether he had surmised correctly an usher summoned him to the presence of the King.

Charles rubbed his hands gleefully while the Gascon was pouring out his thanks.

"Chevalier," said he, "you really don't owe me any thanks. The story of the box in which you packed our worthy general — I mean our excellent Duke of Albemarle — is worth four times the money I paid you."

And the King burst into a fit of laughter.

D'Artagnan did not think it proper to interrupt his Majesty, but listened with an air of modest self-approbation.

"By the way," continued Charles, "has Monk really forgiven you, I wonder?"

"Forgiven me! I hope so, Sire."

"You do? Still, you know, it was a rather cruel trick. Odds-fish! to pack up the most important personage of the English Revolution in a barrel, just as if he were a herring! In your place, chevalier, I should feel a bit uneasy."

"But, Sire —"

"Oh, I am well aware Monk calls you his friend. But he has too penetrating an eye not to have a memory, and too lofty a brow not to have a great deal of pride; *grande supercilium*, you know."

"I 'm determined, from this out, that I 'll study Latin," said D'Artagnan to himself.

"I see it," cried the merry monarch, "I see I must heal the breach between you two; I 'll set about it in such a manner —"

D'Artagnan bit his mustache.

"Will your Majesty permit me to tell you the truth?"

"Speak, chevalier, speak."

"Well, Sire, you have alarmed me terribly. If your Majesty set about arranging the matter in the mode you suggest, I 'm a lost man, — the duke will have me assassinated."

The King again burst out laughing, and this changed the alarm of D'Artagnan into downright dismay.

"Sire, for goodness' sake promise me to let me manage this affair in my own way; and if your Majesty have no further need of my services —"

"No, I cannot, chevalier. By the way, you 're not wishing

to leave us?" answered Charles, with another hilarious outbreak that completed the discomfiture of our poor musketeer.

"Yes, if your Majesty have no further commands."

Charles became suddenly serious or almost so.

"But I have. I wish you to see my sister, the Princess Henrietta. Is she acquainted with you?"

"No, Sire, — moreover, an old soldier like myself is hardly a pleasant sight for a lively young princess."

"I tell you I want my sister to form your acquaintance. I wish her to have you to rely on, should she ever need help."

"Sire, any one who is dear to your Majesty is sacred to me."

"I believe you. Parry! come this way, my old friend."

A side door opened and Parry entered. He looked delighted as soon as his eyes fell upon D'Artagnan.

"What is Rochester about?" said the King.

"He is on the canal with the ladies," answered Parry.

"And Buckingham?"

"He is there also."

"That's fortunate. You will conduct the chevalier to Villiers — the Duke of Buckingham's family name, chevalier — and request him to present M. d'Artagnan to Princess Henrietta."

Parry bowed and smiled at D'Artagnan.

"Chevalier," continued the King, "this is your last audience, and you can leave whenever you wish."

"Thanks, Sire."

"But I would advise you to make your peace with Monk."

"Oh! Sire —"

"I suppose you know I have placed one of my vessels at your disposal?"

"Why, Sire, your kindness overpowers me. But I really cannot think of putting your Majesty's officers to any trouble on my account."

The King clapped D'Artagnan on the shoulder.

"No one will be put to any trouble on your account, but rather on account of an ambassador I am sending to France. You will like him as a companion, I fancy, for you are already acquainted with him."

D'Artagnan looked astonished.

"His name is the Comte de la Fère, the person you call Athos," added the King, ending as he had begun the con-

versation, with a merry laugh. "Adieu, chevalier, adieu! Keep a place in your heart for me, as I do for you."

Then, after a gesture to Parry to learn if any one were waiting in the next apartment, he vanished into his study, leaving the chevalier in a state of utter bewilderment after this strange audience.

The old man took his arm in a friendly way, and led him into the gardens.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE CANAL.

Over the dark green waters of the canal, bordered with marble curbstones, upon which time had already scattered many a stain of black and sundry tufts of moss, glided majestically a long flat boat, adorned with English flags, covered with damasked tapestry that trailed its fringes in the stream, and surmounted by a dais. Eight rowers leaning lightly on their oars sent it along on its course with the graceful slowness of the swans that, disturbed in their time-honored ownership by the track made by the bark, looked on from afar at this brilliant and noisy pageant. We say noisy, for there were four lute and guitar players aboard, two singers, and several courtiers, all bedizened with gold and jewels, and all vieing for the prize of pleasing the Princess Henrietta Stuart, granddaughter of Henri IV., daughter of Charles I., and sister of Charles II., who was seated in the place of honor under the dais.

We are acquainted with this youthful princess; we saw her with her mother at the Louvre, in want of wood and bread, and fed by the coadjutor and the parliament. Like her brothers, then, she had had a struggle in her early days. But she had suddenly awakened from that long and horrible dream, awakened to find herself sitting on the steps of a throne and surrounded by courtiers and flatterers. Like Mary Stuart, then, after leaving her prison she breathed the air of life and liberty; but, unlike Mary Stuart, she also breathed the air of power and opulence.

The princess had grown up to be a strikingly beautiful woman, and ever since the Restoration this beauty of hers had

been universally appreciated. It was enhanced by an air of pride which she had lost during her misfortunes and regained during her prosperity. She was resplendent in her joy and happiness, like those hot-house flowers which hang their heads when forgotten during the early frosts of autumn, but, warmed by the atmosphere of their natal soil, raise them on the morrow and look more gorgeous than ever.

Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the son of the man who played so celebrated a rôle in the early chapters of our story, a handsome cavalier, melancholy with women and merry with men, and Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, merry with men and women alike, were at this moment standing before the princess, and contending for the privilege of amusing her.

As for the beautiful young lady herself, reclining on gold-embroidered velvet cushions and steeping her hands listlessly in the current, she listened carelessly to the musicians without hearing them, and heard the two courtiers without — apparently — listening to them.

And the reason for this was that Henrietta, a most charming creature, a woman who united in her own person all the graces that adorned her sex both in France and England, not being in love as yet, turned her fondness for coquetry into a cruel sport. And so her countenance was hardly ever lit up by a smile, that innocent favor granted by young maidens; and if she sometimes raised her eyes, it was to rivet them on some cavalier so steadily that his usual unblushing gallantry took alarm and became quite abject.

However, the boat still continued its progress, the musicians plied their trade furiously, and the courtiers were almost as much out of breath as they were. Moreover, the monotony of the excursion was evidently beginning to pall on the princess, for all of a sudden she shook her head impatiently and said:

"Oh, gentlemen, we have had enough of this, let us return."

"Ah! your royal Highness," answered Buckingham, "we are very unfortunate, since we have not been able to render this excursion pleasant for you."

"My mother is waiting for me," replied the princess; "and besides, to be frank with you, I feel dreadfully bored, gentlemen."

While uttering these merciless words, the princess made an effort to console with an amiable glance the two young noblemen, who were thrown into consternation by such frankness.

The glance, however, produced its usual effect, and the two faces brightened; but as if the royal coquette had imagined that she had been a little too condescending to these mere mortals, she started abruptly, turned her back on her two adorers, and to all appearance plunged into a reverie in which, evidently, they had no share.

Buckingham bit his lips angrily, for he was really in love with Henrietta, and so everything connected with her had a serious aspect in his eyes. Rochester bit his lips, too, but as wit was a far more marked feature in his character than was heart, he did so purely and simply to repress a fit of malicious laughter. The princess, turning away from the young men, allowed her gaze to wander to the green and flower-enamelled banks on each side of her. She caught a glimpse of Parry and D'Artagnan in the distance.

"Who is that over yonder?" she asked.

The two young men turned round with the quickness of lightning.

"Parry," answered Buckingham; "only Parry."

"Excuse me," said Rochester, "he has some one with him, if I am not mistaken."

"Yes, I think he has," said the princess, languidly; "but, duke, pray, what do you mean by the words 'only Parry'?"

"I have used them, madame, because our faithful Parry, our vagrant Parry, our eternal Parry, is not, I fancy, of any great consequence."

"You are in error, my lord duke. Parry, the 'vagrant Parry,' as you call him, has been a vagrant in the service of my family, and the sight of this old man always affords me the greatest pleasure."

The Princess Henrietta followed the ordinary route taken by pretty women, and, above all, by pretty coquettes. She passed from caprice to spitefulness; the gallant had been compelled to submit to her caprice, the courtier was now forced to put up with her spitefulness. Buckingham bowed, but did not answer.

"It is quite true, madame," said Rochester, bowing also, "that Parry is the model of faithful servants. But, madame, he is no longer young, and we are amused only by what is cheerful. Now, is an old man really a cheerful spectacle?"

"Enough, my lord," answered the princess, dryly; "I am not pleased with the tone of your conversation."

Then, as if communing with herself, she murmured:

"The little respect my brother's friends have for my brother's servants is really astounding!"

"Ah! madame," exclaimed Buckingham, "your royal Highness plants in my heart a dagger that has been forged by your own hands."

"What does that phrase mean, duke? It is turned like a French madrigal. I do not understand it."

"It means, madame, that you yourself, you who are so kind and charming and tender, have sometimes laughed — pardon me, I should have said smiled — at the senile gabble of that excellent Parry, with respect to whom you exhibit such sensibility on the present occasion."

"And if, my lord duke, I have so far forgotten myself, it is not your place to remind me of the fact."

And she turned round impatiently.

"Apparently my good friend Parry desires to speak with me. Lord Rochester, oblige me by ordering them to row to shore."

Rochester hastened to repeat the princess's order, and a moment later the boat touched the bank.

"Let us get on land, gentlemen," said the princess, taking Rochester's arm, although Buckingham was nearer and had offered his. Then Rochester, with an ill-concealed exultation that pierced the unfortunate Buckingham's heart through and through, escorted Henrietta over the little bridge which the sailors had thrown from the royal boat on to the bank.

"Where is your royal Highness going?" asked Rochester.

"You can see for yourself, my lord; I am going to meet my good friend, 'the vagrant Parry,' as his grace of Buckingham has styled him. He is trying to see me with those eyes that have been dimmed by the tears he has shed over our misfortunes."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Rochester, "your royal Highness is in a terribly melancholy mood to-day. You must think us, I am afraid, ridiculous fools —"

"Speak for yourself, my lord," interrupted Buckingham; "as for me, her royal Highness dislikes me so much that she does not think of me at all!"

Neither Rochester nor the princess answered; the latter forced her escort to adopt a quicker pace. Buckingham lagged a little behind, and turned his isolation to account by biting

his handkerchief so furiously that that piece of cambric was soon torn into rags.

"Parry, my good Parry," said the princess, in her soft, low-pitched tones, "come this way. I saw you were looking for me and I am waiting for you."

"Ah, madame," broke in Rochester, with the charitable object of helping his companion, who, as we have said, had stayed a little behind, "if Parry does not see you, the man with him ought to be a fairly good guide, even for a blind man, for he has, really, eyes of flame; the fellow is a double-lamped lantern."

"And the face he is lighting is a very handsome and martial-looking one," said the princess, determined to let no opportunity slip of making an open attack on her adorers.

Rochester bent low.

"He has one of those energetic, soldierly heads you never see outside of France," she added, with the persistence of the woman who is sure of impunity.

Rochester and Buckingham exchanged glances that signified: "What in the mischief ails her?"

"Go and find out what Parry wishes, duke," said Henrietta, "go."

The young man, regarding this order as a favor, shook off his depression and hurried to meet Parry, who, followed by D'Artagnan, advanced slowly toward the noble party. Parry walked slowly because of his age. D'Artagnan walked slowly — and majestically — because it was the way in which a D'Artagnan who owned the third of a million ought to walk, that is to say, with no swagger, but also with no timidity.

When Buckingham, who had shown extreme eagerness to comply with the commands of the princess, now seated upon a marble bench, as if exhausted by the few steps she had taken, — when Buckingham, we say, was within a few steps of Parry, the latter recognized him.

"Ah!" said he, quite out of breath, "your grace will obey an order given by the King?"

"What is it, Parry?" asked the young man, with a kind of coldness tempered by the desire of pleasing the princess.

"His Majesty requests you to present this gentleman to Princess Henrietta."

"But in the first place, who is he?" inquired the duke, haughtily.

It did not take much, as we know, to nettle D'Artagnan; Buckingham's tone did not please him at all. He surveyed the courtier from top to toe, and two flashes shot from beneath his frowning temples. Then, with an effort:

"M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan," he answered composedly.

"Excuse me, monsieur, but all I know so far is your name."

"Which signifies?"

"Which signifies that I do not know you."

"I am more fortunate than you, then, for I had the honor of knowing your family and particularly your illustrious father, the late duke."

"My father? Yes, monsieur, it seems to me I remember — M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, you say?"

D'Artagnan bowed.

"Himself in person," said he.

"Pardon me, but are you not one of those Frenchmen who had certain secret relations with my father?"

"Correct, my lord duke. I am one of those Frenchmen."

"Then is it not strange that my father never heard of you during his lifetime?"

"Yes, my lord duke, but he heard of me at the time of his death. It was I who warned him, through the valet de chambre of Anne of Austria, of the danger he was incurring. Unluckily, my warning came too late."

"No matter, monsieur," said Buckingham, "I suppose that after once intending to render a service to the father, you have come now to seek the protection of the son."

"In the first place, your grace," answered D'Artagnan, phlegmatically, "I have no intention of seeking anybody's protection. His Majesty King Charles II., to whom I have had the honor of doing some service, — I had best tell your grace that my life has been spent in doing similar kinds of services, — King Charles II., then, no doubt with the purpose of showing me special honor, desired that I should be presented to his sister, the Princess Henrietta, to whom I might also, perhaps, have the pleasure of being useful on some future occasion. Now, the King, learning that you were at present with the princess, requested Parry to conduct me to your presence. That is all the mystery there is to it. I have absolutely no favor to ask of you, and if you do not care to present me to her royal Highness, I shall be pained at having to

D'ARTAGNAN MEETS THE PRINCESS.

dispense with your services, but bold enough to present myself."

"At least," retorted Buckingham, determined to have the last word, "you will not flinch from an explanation that has been provoked by yourself."

"I never flinch, monsieur," said D'Artagnan.

"As, however, you have had certain relations with my father you must be acquainted with some private details?"

"These relations are now very remote from us; you were not born at the time, and the handful of unlucky diamond studs I received from his hand and carried to France would hardly serve as an excuse for awakening so many memories."

"Ah! monsieur," said Buckingham, quickly advancing to D'Artagnan and holding out his hand, "it was you, then! It was you whom my father sought for so eagerly, you who had a right to hope for so much from us!"

"Hope! I have quite a genius for hoping; I have done little else but hope during my entire life."

In the meantime the princess, who had grown tired waiting for the stranger, rose and approached.

"At least, monsieur," said Buckingham, "you won't have to lose any time hoping for the introduction you have requested of me."

Then, turning round and bowing to Henrietta:

"Madame," said the young man, "the King, your brother, desires that I should have the honor of presenting to your royal Highness M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"In order that your royal Highness may have at hand, when needed, a stanch champion and a firm friend," added Parry.

D'Artagnan bowed.

"You have something further to say, have you not, Parry?" answered the princess, with a smile for the benefit of D'Artagnan, though her words were for the aged servitor.

"Yes, madame, his Majesty wishes you never to forget the merits and services of M. d'Artagnan, to whom his Majesty says he owes the recovery of his kingdom."

Buckingham, the princess, and Rochester exchanged looks of astonishment.

"Another little secret," said D'Artagnan, "of which I shall not, in all probability, boast to the son of his Majesty King Charles II., just as I have not made any boast to you in connection with your father's diamonds."

"Madame," said Buckingham, "the chevalier has, for the second time, recalled to my memory an incident which has aroused my curiosity to such a degree that I must ask your royal Highness's leave to converse with him for a moment in private."

"Do so, duke," said the princess, "but bring back quickly to the sister the friend who is so devoted to the brother."

And she again took Rochester's arm, while Buckingham took D'Artagnan's.

"Chevalier," said the duke, "pray relate to me the entire history of the diamonds; no one knows anything about it in England, not even the son of its hero."

"My lord duke, the only person who had a right to relate that history was your father. He has deemed it his duty to be silent, and I must ask your permission to imitate him."

And D'Artagnan bowed with the air of a man upon whom entreaties can make no impression.

"Since that is the case, monsieur," answered Buckingham, "pardon my indiscretion, I beseech you; and if I, too, were one day to enter France —"

And he turned to look at the princess, who took no notice of him, being absorbed, or apparently absorbed, in the task of listening to Rochester.

Buckingham sighed.

"Well, then?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"I was saying: 'If I, too, were one day to enter France —'"

"You'll enter it, duke, I'll answer for that," said D'Artagnan, with a smile.

"Why do you think so?"

"Oh, I have a strange knack for predicting events, and am rarely mistaken in my presentiments. Should you enter France, then?"

"Then, monsieur, I shall ask of you, to whose peerless friendship kings are indebted for their crowns, a little of that regard you once entertained for my father."

"My lord duke," answered D'Artagnan, "I assure you I shall feel highly honored if in France you should condescend to remember that you once met me here. And now, with your permission —"

Then turning to the princess:

"Madame," said he, "your royal Highness is a child of France, and as such I hope to see you some day in Paris.

One of the happiest days of my life will be the day upon which you shall give me any order, no matter what be its nature, that will assure me you have not forgotten the advice of your august brother."

And he bowed to the young princess, who offered him her hand to kiss with right royal graciousness.

"Ah, madame," said Buckingham, in an undertone, "what must a man do to obtain a similar favor from your royal Highness?"

"Really, duke," answered the princess, "you had better ask M. d'Artagnan; perhaps he will tell you."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN, JUST AS IF HE WERE A FAIRY, DREW A SUMMER RESIDENCE FROM A DEAL BOX.

The King's words anent Monk's vanity had inspired D'Artagnan with no small degree of apprehension. During his entire life the lieutenant had exhibited a kind of genius in electing his enemies according to the dictates of his own free will, and if he could neither placate nor conquer them, it had not been for want of trying. But many things in our existence depend on the point of view. Life is a magic lantern, the aspects of which the eye of man modifies every year. As a consequence, between the last day of a year, during which everything seemed to us white, and the first day of the following year, during which everything will seem to us black, there elapses but a single night.

Now when D'Artagnan departed from Calais with his ten rascals, he would have thought as little of having a set-to with a Goliath, a Nebuchadnezzar, or a Holofernes as he would of crossing swords with a recruit or cracking a joke with his landlady. At that time he resembled the hawk, which when pinched with hunger will assault a ram; for hunger blinds. But D'Artagnan gorged with wealth, D'Artagnan the conqueror, D'Artagnan elated with such a hard-won triumph — such a D'Artagnan had too much to lose not to weigh every chance of possible ill-luck with the most scrupulous exactness.

On his way home from the palace, then, he turned all sorts

of plans over in his mind for mollifying the resentment of Monk, a man so powerful that even King Charles himself had to be very cautious in his dealings with him. Now, as this monarch was hardly yet firmly seated on his throne, he might soon need the aid of his protector, and should that protector demand such a trifling satisfaction as the transportation of M. d'Artagnan, or his incarceration in a Middesex dungeon, or the dropping of him quietly over the side of the vessel that was bearing him from Dover to Boulogne, why, the *protégé* could never refuse his protector such a paltry favor as any of these would be. Boons of this character are granted by kings to viceroys without attracting any notice whatever.

It was not even necessary that the King should take a hand in the game in which Monk was to have his revenge. His Majesty's part in the affair would simply be limited to the function of pardoning the viceroy of Ireland for anything he might undertake against D'Artagnan. To set the conscience of the Duke of Albemarle at rest, all that was needed was the royal *te absolvo*, uttered as a jest, or a scrawl on a parchment with the words *Carolus Rex* at the bottom; and the consequence of the two words spoken or of the two words written would be equally ruinous, according to his excited fancy, to our poor D'Artagnan.

And then he stood alone, and this for such a perspicacious personage as our musketeer was rather ominous. He was not even quite sure he could rely upon the friendship of Athos. Certainly, if it were a question of hard knocks and cutting and thrusting, he might depend on the aid of his comrade. But in a delicate matter involving the honor of a king, especially if there were the slightest reason for imputing his misfortune to some untoward accident with which Charles had apparently no connection, D'Artagnan was too well acquainted with the royalist sentiments of Athos to doubt his perfect trust in the loyalty of the English sovereign. He would content himself with shedding floods of tears on the tomb of his departed friend and composing an epitaph setting forth that friend's virtues in the most eloquent style possible.

"Decidedly," was the conclusion of the Gascon, — a conclusion that resulted from premises which he worked out in silence and which we have taken the liberty of voicing, — "decidedly I must make it up with Monk and must find out whether he has taken what has occurred to heart or not. If, which God

forbid, he prove cold and ungracious, I 'll ask Athos to take my money away with him, and I 'll stay in England myself just long enough to unmask him; then, at the first sign of hostility, — I have some shrewdness and dexterity, — I 'll decamp and take refuge with Buckingham, who, I fancy, is at bottom rather a good-natured fellow; in return for his hospitality, I will tell him all about the diamonds. The story can now compromise no one but an old queen, and the woman who could marry a measly skinflint like Mazarin need not be ashamed of having been once the mistress of such a handsome nobleman as Buckingham. *Mordioux!* it 's the very thing to do; I won't let Monk get the whip-hand of me. But! — I have an idea!"

We know that, generally speaking, ideas were not the things that D'Artagnan lacked most. That he had got one now, however, was due to the fact that he had buttoned himself up to the chin, and nothing stimulated his imagination better than this mode — called *accintion* by the Romans — of preparing for all eventualities. When he reached the Duke of Albemarle's he was quite in a perspiration. He was shown into the viceroy's study with a readiness that proved he was regarded as a friend of the house.

"My lord duke," said D'Artagnan, with that air of frankness he knew so well how to give to his features, "I have come to ask your grace's advice."

Monk, as tightly buttoned up morally as the Gascon was physically, said:

"Well, ask it, my dear fellow."

And he assumed an expression of frankness that fully equalled D'Artagnan's own.

"But first of all, my lord duke, you must promise me both secrecy and forgiveness."

"I promise whatever you require. What is the trouble? speak out."

"The trouble is, your grace, that I don't like the way the King is going on."

"Indeed! and what is it you don't like in him, my dear lieutenant?"

"I don't like his Majesty's jokes; some of them are really injurious to his servants; I don't know of any weapon that can inflict a deeper wound on soldiers like us than a joke."

Monk did his very best to hide his thoughts; but D'Arta-

gnan was watching him too keenly not to perceive that a faint color had come into his cheeks.

However, the duke said, with the most natural air in the world:

"Oh, so far as I am concerned, I do not mind a joke now and then, my dear fellow. My soldiers, indeed, will tell you that I used to listen without annoyance, nay, even with some degree of enjoyment, to the satirical ballads made on me in Lambert's army, and afterward sung by my own troops; yet they would have certainly grated rather harshly on the ears of a general more sensitive than I am."

"Oh," answered D'Artagnan, "I know your grace is an incomparable man, I know that you have long risen to a height where the miseries of human life do not reach you. Still there are jokes and jokes, and there are certain jokes that fairly lash me at least into fury."

"And what are they, pray?"

"Those directed against my friends, or against people I respect, your grace."

Monk gave a slight start, but, slight as it was, D'Artagnan perceived it.

"But how," asked Monk, "can a pin that pricks another scratch your skin? Tell me; this is getting interesting."

"My lord duke, my explanation shall be limited to a single sentence: the matter I have alluded to concerns yourself."

Monk advanced a step toward D'Artagnan.

"Concerns me?" said he.

"Yes; I cannot account for it; perhaps because I am unacquainted with his disposition. How can the King have the heart to laugh at a man who has rendered him such inestimable services? How can he take any delight in setting a lion like you and a gnat like me by the ears."

"But I cannot, for the life of me, see that he does," said Monk.

"You don't! But surely, the King, who was bound to reward me, could have given me the sort of reward that a soldier ought to have; he might have let that story about the ransom pass; it comes too near you, my lord duke."

"No," returned Monk, laughing, "I do not see that it has anything to do with me, upon my honor."

"Certainly, it shall have nothing to do with you, if I can help it. Your grace knows what I am, a man that can be as

silent as the grave, and more so. But — does your grace understand ? "

" No," answered Monk, with persistent obstinacy.

" If some one else knew the secret I know — "

" What secret ? "

" Why, my lord duke, that wretched secret of Newcastle."

" Hum ! the Comte de la Fère's million ? "

" No, the attack made on your grace's person."

" Oh, you played your cards cleverly, chevalier ; I don't see anything else there is in it. You are an astute soldier as well as a brave one, uniting, clearly, the merits of a Fabius with those of a Hannibal. You used the tools that were ready to your hand : bravery and astuteness. What have I to complain of ? I should have been more on my guard, that is all."

" Oh, I know that, your grace, and from my knowledge of your fairness I expected you to say nothing else. If there was nothing but the abduction to be considered, *mordioux !* we might n't bother about it ; but there is — "

" What ? "

" The circumstances connected with the abduction."

" What circumstances ? "

" You know what I mean, my lord duke."

" I 'm damned if I do ! "

" There is — I cannot bring my tongue to utter it."

" There is ? "

" That infernal chest," continued D'Artagnan.

Monk colored visibly.

" The indignity you suffered in being jammed into a box ; it was a deal box, you know ? "

" Indeed ! I had forgotten it."

" A deal box," continued D'Artagnan, " with holes for the nose and mouth. The other incidents might be excused, your grace ; but the box, the box ! Ah ! my lord duke, that was an ill-natured joke to play on any one ! "

It was self-evident that Monk was on thorns.

" And yet all I did, I did simply as a soldier of fortune. Moreover, if I have committed an inconsiderate act — though, perhaps, the gravity of the situation might be some excuse for it — I am prudent and taciturn."

" Oh, for that matter, I know you well and appreciate your good qualities, I assure you," said Monk.

D'Artagnan never took his eyes off Monk, trying to read every thought that passed through his mind.

"I am not really concerned in this affair at all," he continued.

"Then who is?" asked Monk, who was getting impatient.

"The King, who will never know when to keep his mouth shut."

"Well, supposing he should speak, what then?" stammered Monk.

"My lord duke, with a man of such transparent frankness as I am, there is no need of dissimulation, no need for you to hide the mortification your pride must have suffered, however genuine your amiability. What the devil! A man of your importance, a man who plays with crowns and sceptres as a gypsy plays with his balls at a fair, to be boxed up like some curious object of natural history! Certainly you know that all your enemies — and you are too great and noble and generous not to have a good many of them — would go into fits of laughter if they heard the story. Why, if you were depicted as you looked in that box, half the human race would go into fits of laughter, for that matter. Now it would not be becoming to have people laughing at the second greatest personage in the realm."

The idea of being represented as he must have appeared in that box made Monk lose countenance altogether.

As D'Artagnan had wisely foreseen, the fear of ridicule had far more influence over his mind than the risks of war, the promptings of ambition, or the dread of death could ever have had.

"Capital!" thought the Gascon; "he's afraid. I'm safe."

"Oh, as regards the King, my dear fellow," said Monk, "you need not be alarmed; the King will think twice before joking with Monk, you may take my word for it!"

The flash that shot from Monk's eye was caught on its passage by D'Artagnan. The general saw it and grew calm immediately.

"The King," said he, "is too high-minded and noble-hearted to think of working evil to one who has wrought him so much good."

"Oh, certainly," cried D'Artagnan, "I am quite at one with you as to the King's heart, but I'm not so sure as to his head; he's good-natured, but he's light-minded."

"He will not be light-minded when he is dealing with Monk, I assure you."

"Then you have no fears, my lord duke?"

"None with respect to that matter, none, certainly."

"Oh, I understand. You have no fears with respect to the King."

"I have told you so."

"But have you none with respect to me?"

"I thought I had assured you that I have the utmost confidence in your loyalty and discretion."

"Yes, yes, no doubt. But then there is another point to be taken into consideration."

"What is it?"

"That I am not the only one concerned in this business. I have companions; and what companions!"

"Oh, yes, I know them."

"Unfortunately, they know your grace also."

"Well?"

"Well, they are over yonder at Boulogne, and they are waiting for me."

"And you are afraid —"

"Yes, I am afraid that, during my absence — confound it, why am I not there with them? If I were, I could easily close their mouths."

"Was I not right in telling you, then, that the danger, if danger there is, does not come from his Majesty, though he likes to have his jest, but from your companions, as you call them. To be laughed at by a king is endurable, but to be laughed at by the offscourings of an army — damn it!"

"Yes, I can easily see that it is unbearable, and so I have just been saying to myself: 'Would it not be desirable for me to start for France at the earliest date possible?'"

"Beyond a doubt, if you think your presence —"

"Would make those rascals hold their tongues; I'm quite sure it would."

"But if the report has been noised abroad already I don't see how your presence will keep it from spreading."

"Oh, I don't believe it has; at all events I can assure your grace that there is one thing I have made up my mind to."

"What is it?"

"To crack the skull of the first man that started the rumor and of the first man that heard it. Then if I have to fly for

refuge to England I hope your grace will give me some office or other near your person."

"Oh, yes; come back here by all means."

"Unfortunately, my lord duke, I know no one here but yourself. And should I not find you here, or should the grandeur of your surroundings have banished me from your memory —"

"Now just listen to me, M. d'Artagnan," answered Monk, "you are a charming gentleman, full of intelligence and courage; you deserve to win the highest success that can be achieved in this world. Come to me in Scotland and I pledge you my solemn word you 'll find that your lot in my viceroyalty shall be an enviable one."

"Oh, my lord duke, that is impossible at present. At present I have a sacred duty to fulfil; I have to guard your fame; I have to see to it that no foul-mouthed jester shall tarnish the glory of your name in the eyes of your contemporaries, nay, what is worse, in the eyes of posterity."

"Posterity, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Undoubtedly; and, therefore, we must take care that all the details of the affair shall be utterly unknown to posterity; for suppose the story of that deal box were spread abroad; it would be said that you had not restored the King out of a spirit of loyalty and of your own free will, but because of an arrangement made between you two at Scheveningen. Of course I shall give an account of what really occurred; but I might just as well hold my tongue; no one will believe me. On the contrary, every one will say I had my share of the cake and am now eating it."

Monk frowned.

"Glory, honor, probity," he murmured, "ye are but empty words!"

"A foggy mist, your grace, through which you see nothing clearly," added D'Artagnan.

"Well, then, go to France, my dear friend," said Monk, "go, and, to render England more attractive and agreeable to you, you must accept a token to remember me by."

"What next, I wonder!" thought D'Artagnan.

"I have," continued Monk, "a little house on the banks of the Clyde, sheltered by trees, — a cottage, as we call it here. There are about one hundred and fifty acres attached to the house. Will you accept it?"

"Oh! your grace —"

"Faith, you will be your own master there; it will afford you the sort of refuge you were speaking of just now."

"To confer so great a favor as that on me! I assure your grace, honestly, that I am ashamed to accept it."

"No," returned Monk, with an arch smile, "it is you, rather, who are about to confer a great favor on me."

And pressing the musketeer's hand,

"I will go now," said he, "and draw up the deed of gift."

And he passed out.

D'Artagnan looked after him; he was thoughtful and even affected.

"Upon my word," he muttered at length, "he is a fine fellow, when all is said and done. It's rather depressing, though, to feel that he treats me as he does rather out of fear than out of love. Well, let us hope the love will come afterward."

Then, after meditating a moment:

"Bah!" said he, "what's the use of taking the matter to heart? After all, he's an Englishman!"

Still, when he left the house he was a good deal disturbed by the scene in which he had been an actor.

"So now," said he, "I am a land-proprietor, if you please. But how the devil am I to share this cottage with Planchet, except I give him the land and I take the house, or let him take the house and I the — Oh, humbug! My lord duke would never suffer me to share with a grocer a house in which he had lived himself. He is quite too proud a man to hear of such a thing. Besides, why should I speak of it to Planchet? It was not with the money of the company, it was by my own genius I acquired this estate. But I'll see Athos about it."

And he made his way to the lodgings of the Comte de la Fère.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN MADE UP THE DEBTOR AND CREDITOR ACCOUNTS OF THE COMPANY.

"DECIDEDLY," thought D'Artagnan, "I'm having a run of luck. That star which shines once in every man's life, that star which shone even for Job and for Irus, for the most unfortunate of Jews and the most poverty-stricken of Greeks, has at last shone for me also. Well, I'll try to make the most of my good fortune and to avoid foolishness; I am certainly old enough to have acquired a little common sense by this time."

He supped on that evening in a state of high good-humor with his friend Athos, but did not make any reference to the expected donation. He could not help questioning his companion, however, during the course of the repast, on the subject of crops, sowing, planting, and the like. Athos answered courteously, as was to be expected. He fancied D'Artagnan was thinking of becoming a land-proprietor. More than once he fell to regretting the lack of gayety, the absence of the merry sallies, that had once distinguished his vivacious comrade in other days. But D'Artagnan was now gravely employed in tracing figures on the grease at the bottom of his plate and adding up sums of portentous dimensions.

The order, or, rather, the permission, to embark came to them the same night. While the paper containing it was being handed to the count, another messenger brought D'Artagnan a little bundle of documents furnished with the multiplicity of seals which must accompany all deeds for the transfer of land property in England. Athos surprised him as he was turning over the papers that established his right to a valuable estate. The prudent, or, as many would say, the generous Monk had treated his free gift as a purchase and acknowledged the receipt of fifteen thousand livres as the price of the property that had changed hands.

The messenger had taken himself off, but D'Artagnan continued to read and Athos to look on, smiling.

D'Artagnan, having caught one of these smiles, across his shoulder, hastily rammed the papers back in their case.

"Excuse me," said Athos.

"Oh, you are quite excusable, my dear fellow," answered the lieutenant. "In fact, I should like —"

"Not a word, if you please; orders are sacred things, and the person charged with them ought not to give a hint of their nature even to his father or his brother. Why, I myself, who have a more tender affection for you than for father, brother, or any one in the world —"

"Except Raoul!"

"My affection for Raoul will be still greater when he is a man, and when his natural disposition is revealed by his deeds — as yours have been, my friend."

"You suggested just now that you had received an order which you could not disclose to me?"

"Yes, my dear D'Artagnan."

The Gascon sighed.

"There was a time," said he, "when you would have laid such an order open on the table before me, and said: 'D'Artagnan, read that scrawl to Porthos, Aramis, and me!'"

"True. Ah! that was in our youth, in the gracious season of loyalty and trust, when the blood, warmed by generous feeling, holds full sway!"

"Well, Athos, — you won't object to what I am about to say?"

"Speak on, my friend."

"As for your worshipped past, your gracious season, your warmed-up blood that holds full sway, they are no doubt all very beautiful things, but I don't regret them at all. They are like our college days — I am always meeting some idiot who pretends to look back fondly to the time of his floggings, impositions, and crusts of stale bread — you may think it queer, but I have never felt that way. However laborious and sober my habits (and you know they were both, Athos), however plain my garb, there never was a time when I should not have preferred the braveries of Porthos to my thin student's gown, which was no protection against the cold in winter or the sun in summer. Look you, my friend, I am always inclined to have my doubts about the man who pretends to prefer misery to happiness. Now, during that past time to which I am alluding, I was always miserable; not a month elapsed that I had n't a fresh hole in my skin, or in my cassock, and a crown less in a very lean purse. I don't look back with the slightest regret, I assure you, to those abominable days of seesaw and

such-like games; the only thing pleasant connected with them is our friendship. For, you see, I have a heart, and how it happens that that heart has not been dried up by the blasts of misery which were constantly passing through the holes in my cloak, or pierced by the multiform swords that passed through the holes in my poor flesh, is to me a mystery."

"Well, at least," said Athos, "our friendship was a pleasant feature in that past of yours; and it will last as long as we do. Friendship is almost entirely composed of memories and habits, and, though you were just now a little satirical regarding my friendship, because I hesitated to reveal to you the nature of my mission in France —"

"I? heavens! if you were only aware, my dear and true friend, of my utter indifference to all missions from this time forward!"

And he stuffed the little case containing his parchments into his capacious pocket.

Athos rose and summoned the host in order to learn the amount of their bill.

"All the time we have been friends," said D'Artagnan, "I never remember discharging the reckoning once. Porthos did often and Aramis sometimes, while you almost always pulled out your purse at dessert. I am now rich and should like to feel what settling a score looks like."

"Settle this one, then," said Athos, thrusting his purse back into his pocket.

The two friends then started in the direction of the port, D'Artagnan giving many an uneasy glance over his shoulder at the wagon that was freighted with his dear crowns. Night had just spread her thick veil over the yellow waters of the Thames. The rolling of hogsheads and creaking of pulleys gave notice that the ship would soon be under way; they were sounds that had often made the hearts of our musketeers beat quicker, when the dangers of the sea were the least of the perils they had to confront. This time they were to embark on board a large vessel which awaited them at Gravesend, and Charles, always very considerate in small matters, had given orders that one of his yachts, with twelve men belonging to his Scotch guard, should be at the service of the ambassador he was sending to France.

At midnight the yacht put its passengers aboard the vessel, and at eight in the morning the vessel landed the ambassador and his friend at the pier of Boulogne.

While the count and Grimaud were on the lookout for horses to carry them straight to Paris, D'Artagnan was running to the hostelry in which his little army had orders to wait for him. These gentlemen were breakfasting on oysters, fish, and brandy when he made his appearance. They were very merry, but none of them as yet had transgressed the bounds of reason. They greeted their captain with a joyous hurrah.

"Here I am," said D'Artagnan; "the campaign is over. I have come to give each of you the extra sum I promised you."

Their eyes shone.

"I 'll bet there are n't a hundred livres left in the breeches pocket of a single one among you."

"True!" they all chorused.

"And now, gentlemen," continued D'Artagnan, "I wish to give you your final orders. The treaty of commerce which I spoke of when I engaged you has been concluded, all owing to the bold stroke that made us masters of the cleverest financier in England. For I may as well confess that the man we captured was General Monk's treasurer."

This word "treasurer" produced a mighty effect upon the soldiers of his little army, but he noted a slight expression of incredulity in the eyes of Menneville.

"I brought this treasurer," went on D'Artagnan, "to Holland, a neutral country, made him sign the treaty, took him back to Newcastle, and, as he could not be other than satisfied with the handsome way we treated him, having padded the deal coffin with the softest of cushions and taken care to carry it so as not to jolt him, I thought I had a right to ask him for a gratuity for you; and here it is."

He flung a bag of respectable proportions on the tablecloth, and all involuntarily stretched out their hands.

"A moment, my lambs," said D'Artagnan; "this gratuity may not do you much good if you are not careful."

"O-o-oh!" muttered the band in unison.

"The fact is, my friends, we may find ourselves in a tight place, a place from which it should go hard with fellows without brains to get out of. It 's better not to mince matters; we 're between the scaffold and the Bastille."

"O-o-o-oh!" cried the band.

"You can easily see why. It was necessary to account to Monk for the disappearance of his treasurer; but I thought it judicious to wait until King Charles II. was restored, a

thing nobody looked for. Now, King Charles is one of my friends — "

The army exchanged looks of satisfaction, and their satisfaction was not diminished by the air of pride they noticed on the face of their leader.

" As soon as the King was restored I returned Monk his treasurer, despoiled of a few of his feathers, indeed, but I returned him all the same. Now, when General Monk pardoned me — for he did pardon me — he uttered a few words I should advise every one of you to engrave deeply under the roof of his skull and between his two eyes : ' Monsieur,' said he, ' that joke of yours was pretty good; still, I am not particularly fond of jokes. Should a mere hint of what you have done (are you attending, Menneville ?) escape your lips or the lips of your companions, I have in my Irish and Scotch government seven hundred and forty-one gibbets, all of solid oak, clamped with iron and freshly oiled every week. I shall make a present of a gibbet to each one of you, and mark, too, M. d'Artagnan (and do you mark, too, M. Menneville) that I'll still have seven hundred and thirty gibbets left for my private amusements. Nay, more — ' "

" Ah ! ah ! there is more, then ? " exclaimed his henchmen.

" Yes, one danger more. ' M. d'Artagnan, I have accompanied the treaty I am forwarding to the King of France with a request to lock up all who took part in that expedition in the Bastille provisionally, and then send them to me, a request the King is pretty sure to grant.' "

A cry of terror rose on all sides of the table.

" Stop ! stop ! " said D'Artagnan ; " our worthy friend Monk forgot just one thing — he forgot that he does not know the name of a single one of you. I am the only person that has that knowledge, and you are quite assured that I shan't betray you. Why should I ? As for you, I don't suppose you are such a set of boobies as to inform on yourselves. If you are, you may be certain the King would not be long at the expense of boarding and lodging you, but would pack you off in a hurry to Scotland, the land of the seven hundred and forty-one gibbets. That is how matters stand, gentlemen, and I have nothing further to add to what I have just had the honor of telling you. I am sure I have made my meaning clear — have I not, M. de Menneville ? "

" Perfectly clear," replied the latter.

"And now for the crowns!" said D'Artagnan. "Lock the doors."

Thereupon he opened the bag upon the table; several beautiful golden crowns rolled down to the floor, and every one was starting after them.

"Softly!" cried D'Artagnan, "don't any of you stoop unless you want to put me out in my reckoning."

But he made the reckoning all right and handed fifty of those beautiful crowns to each of his men, receiving in return as many blessings as he had distributed coins.

"Now," said he, "if it were possible for you to reform, if you were to become decent, honest citizens —"

"Too hard a job," said one of the band.

"But why do you say that, captain?" asked another.

"Because I might be able to find you again, and — who knows? — another little windfall might come your way now and then —"

He made a sign to Menneville, who had listened to all the proceedings with an air of great composure.

"Menneville," said he, "come along with me. Good-bye, friends; I need not warn you against committing any indiscretion."

Menneville followed him, both pursued by the acclamations of the band, wherewith was mingled the sweet sound of the gold clinking in their pockets.

"Menneville," said D'Artagnan, as soon as they were in the street, "you are not a dupe; take care not to become one. I can see pretty plainly that you are not very much afraid of Monk's gibbets or his Majesty King Louis XIV.'s Bastille; but you will do me the favor to be afraid of me. Now, listen: Let but a word escape your lips, and I shall have as little hesitation in killing you as I would have in killing a chicken. You see, I have an absolution in my pocket from our Holy Father the Pope."

"I assure you, my dear M. d'Artagnan, I am totally ignorant of everything, and that I regard whatever you have said or may say as Gospel truth."

"Oh, from what I have seen of you, I am quite aware you have your wits about you," said the musketeer. "These fifty gold crowns, which I give you over and above what you had already, will prove to you the high estimation in which I hold you. Take them."

"Thanks, M. d'Artagnan," said Menneville.

"With this sum there is no reason why you should not become an honest man," said D'Artagnan, gravely. "It would be disgraceful if a mind like yours and a name you are ashamed to bear should waste away under the rust of an evil life. Try and make yourself a gentleman again, Menneville. You can live a year on the hundred gold crowns I have given you, for it 's a handsome sum, twice the pay of a superior officer. At the end of the year come and see me, and, *mordioux!* I 'll make something of you."

Like his comrades, Menneville took an oath that he would be as silent as the grave. And yet surely somebody must have spoken, and as this "somebody" was certainly neither Menneville nor any of his nine companions, it must have been D'Artagnan, who, like all Gascons, had his tongue very close to his lips. For if not he, pray, who could it be? And who save he could have revealed to us the secret of the deal chest pierced with holes, revealed every incident connected with it so fully that, as the reader must have observed, not even the most trivial details have escaped our knowledge? These very details, trivial though they be, must be admitted to throw a novel and unexpected light on a portion of English history that has been left hitherto untouched by our brother historians.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

WHEREIN IT IS SEEN THAT EVEN IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY THE FRENCH GROCER WAS A PERSONAGE NOT TO BE SNEERED AT.

Having settled his accounts with his companions and given them due warning, D'Artagnan's whole thoughts were now taken up with getting to Paris as speedily as possible. Athos, on his part, was anxious to reach home and to rest for a time. No matter how little a traveller may be affected by the fatigues of his journey, he looks forward with satisfaction to the close of even a beautiful day, for he knows that with night comes sleep. So our two friends as they rode on side by side from Boulogne to Paris, being each, perhaps, somewhat absorbed in his own particular line of thought, had so few matters of inter-

est to communicate to each other that we will not trouble the reader with their conversation. Each of them, given up to his personal reflections, and constructing his future after his own fashion, was especially desirous of getting over as much ground as possible. Athos and D'Artagnan arrived at the barriers of Paris on the evening of the fourth day after leaving Boulogne.

"Where are you going, my dear friend?" inquired Athos. "As for me, I am going straight to my hotel."

"And I straight to my partner's."

"To Planchet's?"

"Of course, yes; to the *Pilon d'Or*."

"But we 'll see each other again?"

"Undoubtedly, if you stay in Paris; for I shall remain here."

"But I shall not; as soon as I have embraced Raoul, whom I have asked to meet me at the hotel, I intend starting immediately for La Fère."

"Then, my dear and peerless friend, adieu!"

"*Au revoir*, rather. I see no reason why you should not come and live with me at Blois. You are now free and wealthy. I will, if you like, buy a nice estate near Chiverny or Bracieux for you. On one side of you you 'll have some of the finest woods in the world, extending as far as those of Chambord; on the other admirable marshes. You are an enthusiastic sportsman, and, although you will not confess it, something of a poet; well, you 'll not only find plenty of pheasant, rail, and widgeon, but gorgeous sunsets and excursions on the river that would throw Nimrod and Apollo themselves into ecstasies. While we are arranging for the purchase, you 'll live at La Fère, and we shall chase the magpies from our vines, as King Louis XIII. used to do: a sober amusement for old fellows like us."

D'Artagnan grasped the hands of Athos.

"My dear count," said he, "I do not accept and I do not refuse. Let me spend some time in Paris, settling my affairs and getting used to the heavy and glittering idea that my mind is always running upon and that dazzles me. I am rich, you see, and until I become accustomed to my wealth I shall — I know my own character — simply render myself odious to every one about me. Now, I have not yet grown so stupid as to care to make a display of my folly before such a friend

as you, Athos. The garment is beautiful, the garment is embroidered all over with gold, but it is new and somewhat tight in the sleeves for me."

Athos smiled.

"I suppose so," said he. "But talking of this same garment, my dear D'Artagnan, will you permit me to give you a piece of advice?"

"Oh, with the greatest pleasure."

"And you will not be angry?"

"Angry? nonsense!"

"When riches suddenly fall to the lot of a person late in life, this person, being averse to change, is bound to become a miser, in other words, not to spend more money than he spent before, or else to fritter away his money, contract debts, and become poor again."

"What you say looks very much like a fallacy, my dear philosopher."

"I don't think so. Do you intend becoming a miser?"

"Not if I know myself! I was one when I had nothing. Circumstances alter cases."

"Then will you be a spendthrift?"

"Still less likely, *mordioux!* Debts frighten me out of my wits. Creditors give me a foretaste of those devils who turn the damned upon their gridirons, and, as patience is not my prevailing virtue, I always feel like drubbing those second-hand devils."

"You are the most sagacious man of my acquaintance, and don't need the advice of any one whatever. Those who might imagine they had anything to teach you would be very simple. But are we not at the Rue Saint-Honoré?"

"Yes, my dear Athos."

"Hold; do you notice yonder long white house on the left? That is where I am lodging. You see it has only two stories. I occupy the apartments on the first floor; those on the second are rented to an officer who is absent on duty eight or nine months every year. That house is really like my own home to me, without the expense."

"Oh, how admirably you manage everything, Athos! Everything on such a liberal scale, and at the same time such order! The very things I should wish to combine. But why talk? It comes from birth and cannot be acquired."

"Flatterer! Well, adieu, my dear friend. By the way, re-

member me to Planchet. Still the same long-headed fellow, I suppose?"

"And good-hearted as well, Athos. Adieu!"

They parted. During their entire conversation D'Artagnan never lost sight of a certain packhorse whose panniers were stuffed with leathern bags, and a portmanteau all covered with hay. Nine o'clock was striking at Saint-Merri. Planchet's shop-boys were getting ready to close. D'Artagnan made the postilion who rode the packhorse stop under a shed at the corner of the Rue des Lombards, summoned one of Planchet's assistants, and ordered him to keep his eye, not only on the two horses, but on the postilion also. Then he entered the establishment of the grocer, who had just had his supper and was sitting in his private room consulting somewhat anxiously the calendar, from which he erased every night the day that was ended. At the moment when Planchet, in accordance with this daily custom of his, was rubbing out with the back of his pen this particular day, D'Artagnan kicked at the door, causing his steel spurs to jingle sharply.

"Ah! great God!" exclaimed Planchet.

The worthy grocer could not utter another syllable — his partner stood before him. The Gascon entered with bent back and lack-lustre eyes; he had formed an idea with respect to Planchet.

"Good Lord!" thought the grocer, staring at the traveller, "he looks sad!"

The musketeer sat down.

"Dear M. d'Artagnan," said Planchet, his heart beating fearfully, "so you are back! And your health?"

"Tolerable, Planchet, tolerable," answered the musketeer, fetching a heavy sigh.

"You have not been wounded, I hope?"

"Oh, what of that?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Planchet, more and more alarmed; "the expedition has been a trying one, then?"

"Yes," returned D'Artagnan.

A shiver set poor Planchet all a-trembling.

"Could I have a drink of something?" asked the lieutenant, looking up piteously.

Planchet ran to the cupboard and poured out a big glass of wine. D'Artagnan stared at the bottle.

"What wine is this?" said he.

"Alas! your favorite wine, M. d'Artagnan, that fine old Anjou wine that was near costing us all so much on a certain occasion."

"Ah! my poor Planchet," answered D'Artagnan, with a melancholy smile, "is it right for me to drink such costly wine?"

"Come, come, my dear master," said Planchet, all his muscles quivering, his pallor and his agitation betraying the keenest anguish, "come, now, I have been a soldier, and have still some courage left; let me know the worst, then, M. d'Artagnan; we have lost our money, have we?"

The time that D'Artagnan, who moved uneasily in his chair, took to answer this question appeared an age to our poor grocer.

"And supposing we had," returned the musketeer, slowly, moving his head up and down, "what would you say, my poor friend?"

From pale Planchet became yellow. It looked as if he were trying to swallow his tongue, his throat was so distended and his eyes were so red. "Twenty thousand livres," he muttered, "twenty thousand livres; still —"

D'Artagnan, with his drooping neck, his nerveless legs and languid hands, resembled a statue of despair. Planchet heaved a sigh from the deepest recesses of his breast.

"Well," said he, "I see it 's all up with us. Let us prove ourselves men. After all, you have got away with your life, monsieur, and that is more important than anything else."

"Yes, yes, a man's life is worth something; but, you see, I am utterly ruined."

"*Cordieu!* monsieur," answered Planchet, "even so, we must n't give up; you 'll become a grocer like myself. I 'll make you my partner; we 'll share the profits, and, when there are no more profits, we 'll share the almonds, raisins, and prunes, and nibble together our last quarter of Dutch cheese."

D'Artagnan could not keep up the deception any longer.

"*Mordioux!*" cried he, deeply affected, "you are an honest old chap, you are, upon my honor, Planchet. But hold on a bit! You have n't been playing a farce all the time, Planchet? You have n't seen the horse and the bags yonder in the street under the shed?"

"What horse? What bags?" asked Planchet, almost heart-broken at the idea that his former master had gone mad.

"Why, the English bags, of course, *mordioux!*" exclaimed D'Artagnan, his face beaming, his whole person transfigured.

"God in heaven have mercy on us!" cried Planchet, frightened out of his wits by the dazzling gleam he saw in D'Artagnan's eyes.

"You blockhead!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "you think I'm crazy! Never, on the contrary, was my head sounder or my heart gladder. Look at the bags, the bags, Planchet!"

"In God's name, what bags?"

D'Artagnan pushed Planchet to the window.

"Look under the shed yonder; do you see a horse?"

"Yes."

"Do you notice that its back is bending under the weight?"

"Yes, yes."

"Do you see one of your boys talking with the postilion?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Well, you know his name, as he is in your employ. Call him."

"Abdon! Abdon!" shrieked Planchet from the window.

"Bring up the horse!" shouted D'Artagnan.

"Bring up the horse!" screamed Planchet.

"Now have ten livres ready for the postilion," said D'Artagnan, in the tone he used in ordering some military evolution, "get two of your lads to bring up the first two bags and two others for the two last, and, *mordioux!* stir yourself, be alive!"

Planchet rushed downstairs as if the devil were at his heels. A moment later the boys were coming up them, bending under their burdens. D'Artagnan sent them off to their attics, carefully shut the door, and, addressing Planchet, whose turn it was to go mad this time:

"Now you and I will have a settlement!" said he.

And he spread a big cloth upon the floor and poured out the contents of the first bag upon it. Planchet did the same with the second; then D'Artagnan, trembling with excitement, disembowelled the third with a knife. When Planchet heard the intoxicating jingle of the gold and silver, when he saw those glittering crowns bursting out of the sacks, wriggling and leaping like fish out of the sweep-net, when he plunged his arm up to the elbow in that ever rising tide of yellow and argent coins, he spun round like a man struck by lightning, and then sank heavily on the enormous pile, his weight scattering it in every direction.

In fact, Planchet, suffocated with joy, lost consciousness. D'Artagnan threw a glass of white wine in his face, which immediately brought him back to life.

"Ah! good God! good God! good God!" he cried, wiping his beard and mustache.

At that time the grocers sported, as, indeed, they do to-day, the trooper's mustache and the foot-soldier's beard; but, alas! baths of silver, rare enough even in those days, have become almost unknown in our age.

"*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, "there are a hundred thousand livres there that belong to you, my worthy partner. Pick up your winnings, if you please; I am going to pick up mine."

"Oh! what a lovely sum, M. d'Artagnan! What a lovely sum!"

"I was just a little sorry about half an hour ago, Planchet, that I had to give up so much to you. But I'm sorry no longer, Planchet; you're a credit to the grocery business. Here, let us get through as quick as possible: short reckonings, you know, make long friends."

"But tell me the whole story," said Planchet, "it must be even finer than the money."

"By my faith," answered D'Artagnan, stroking his mustache, "I don't say but you're right, and if ever any historian turns to me for information, he can't say he has tried to draw from an empty well. Well, listen, Planchet, I will tell you all about it."

"And while you're doing so I'll pile up the crowns. Begin, dear master."

"Here goes, then," said D'Artagnan, drawing a deep breath.

"And here goes, too," said Planchet, picking up his first handful of crowns.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

M. DE MAZARIN'S CARD-PARTY.

On the night of the arrival of the two Frenchmen the entire court met in a vast apartment in the Palais-Royal, hung with dark velvet, which threw into strong relief the gilded frames of a great number of magnificent pictures; the apartment opened into M. le Cardinal de Mazarin's closet, and the occa-

sion of this assemblage was a card-party given by his Eminence in honor of the King and Queen.

A little screen separated three tables arranged for play. At one of these tables were seated the King and the two queens. Louis XIV., who was placed opposite his young wife, smiled on her with an expression of very genuine happiness. Anne of Austria held the cards against the cardinal, and her daughter-in-law assisted her in the game, when she was not smiling back at her husband. As for the cardinal, who was reclining on his bed and looked very weary and very emaciated, his cards were held by the Comtesse de Soissons, and he watched them with an incessant look of eagerness and cupidity.

The cardinal had had himself painted by Bernouin. But the glistening rouge on his cheeks only brought out more vividly the deadly pallor of the rest of his face and the glassy, yellowish tints of his forehead. The eyes, however, shone with more brilliancy than ever, and on them was riveted from time to time the anxious gaze of the King, the two queens, and the courtiers.

The fact is that the two eyes of Signor Mazarin were stars of varying lustre, in which the France of the seventeenth century was in the habit of reading its destiny every evening and every morning.

Monseigneur was neither winning nor losing; and, therefore, monseigneur was neither merry nor sad. From this state of intellectual torpor Anne of Austria would have liked to rouse him, for she pitied him sincerely. But only by some startling stroke could she attract his attention — either by winning or losing. To win would have been dangerous: Mazarin would have substituted for his air of listlessness an ugly grimace. To lose would have been dangerous also: she would have to cheat, and the Infanta, who was watching her mother-in-law's cards closely, would undoubtedly protest against such partiality toward Mazarin.

Profiting by the prevailing stillness, the courtiers chatted. When M. de Mazarin was not in ill-humor, never was prince more affable; he never prevented the people from singing, as long as they paid, and neither was he such a tyrant as to prevent any one from talking, as long as he was bent on losing.

And so the courtiers chatted. At the first table sat the King's younger brother, Philippe, duc d'Anjou, admiring his handsome face in a hand-mirror. His favorite, the Chevalier

de Lorraine, was leaning on the back of the prince's chair and listening, with secret envy, to the Comte de Guiche, another favorite, who was relating in choicest language the shifting fortunes of the royal adventurer, Charles II. He described the almost fabulous incidents connected with his wanderings in Scotland, his terrors when parties of the enemy were on his track, his nights spent in trees, his days in hunger and fighting. Gradually the curiosity of the count's auditors was excited to such a pitch that interest in the game languished, even at the royal table, and the King, though seemingly inattentive, in reality devoured every detail of the Odyssey that was painted in such picturesque colors.

The Comtesse de Soissons interrupted the speaker.

"Come, now, count," said she, "confess that you are giving the reins to your fancy just a little."

"Madame, I simply repeat, like a parrot, the different stories I have heard from Englishmen. Indeed, I am ashamed to say I am as literal as a lawyer's copy."

"Charles II. could never have survived such hardships."

Louis XIV. lifted his noble, intellectual face.

"Madame," said he, in a voice that, though calm, betrayed a little boyish timidity, "M. le Cardinal will tell you the affairs of France were often in such a critical position during my minority that, had I been old enough to wield a sword, I would have occasionally used it to win my supper."

"Oh!" returned the cardinal, now speaking for the first time, "your Majesty exaggerates; your Majesty never had to complain of your supper, nor had your servants, either."

The King flushed.

"But," cried Philippe, thoughtlessly, not moving in his seat, and still admiring himself, "I remember that once at Melun we had no supper; the King ate the two-thirds of a piece of bread and gave me what was left."

The whole assembly, seeing a smile on Mazarin's lips, burst out laughing. Kings are as much flattered by the remembrance of past distress as they are by the hope of future glory.

"The crown of France has always rested firmly on the brows of her kings," Anne of Austria hastened to add, "though it has fallen from the head of the King of England; and whenever it has happened that the crown of France has for an instant — since a popular tumult will sometimes shake a throne, just as an earthquake will sometimes shake the earth

— every time, I say, that rebellion menaced the crown of France, a signal victory has always ensured its triumph."

"And with a few more gems added to the crown also," said Mazarin.

The Comte de Guiche was silent, the King resumed his tranquil demeanor, and Mazarin exchanged a look with Anne of Austria that thanked her for her intervention.

"Never mind," said Philippe, smoothing his locks, "my cousin Charles may not be handsome, but he is very brave and has fought like a lion. If he continue to fight as well as he has done, he 'll win some great battle — like Rocroi — at last, beyond a doubt —"

"He has no soldiers," interrupted the Chevalier de Lorraine.

"Oh, his cousin, the Stadtholder, will furnish him with a few. I know I should have liked to do so, had I been King of France."

The blood mounted to Louis XIV.'s cheeks.

Mazarin affected to be more absorbed in the game than ever.

"Well," resumed De Guiche, "by this time the destiny of this unhappy prince has been fulfilled. If Monk has proved false, he is lost. The life that began with exile, battles, and privations will end in a prison, or, perhaps, on the scaffold."

Mazarin knit his brows.

"Is it quite certain," asked Louis, "that his Majesty King Charles II. has quitted the Hague?"

"Quite certain, your Majesty," answered the young man. "My father received a letter with full details; it is even known that the King landed at Dover; he was seen entering the harbor by some fishermen. What occurred after is yet a mystery."

"But I should like to know what occurred after," exclaimed Philippe, impetuously. "Do you know, brother?"

Louis XIV. reddened again, the third time within an hour.

"Had you not better ask M. le Cardinal?" he said in a tone that startled Mazarin, Anne of Austria, and, indeed, everybody.

"That means, my son," interrupted Anne of Austria, with a laugh, "that the King does not wish affairs of state discussed outside the council."

Philippe took the reproof in good part, and smiling all the time, made a profound bow to his brother and then to his mother.

Mazarin noticed, with half an eye, that the Duc d'Orleans, the Comte de Guiche, the Chevalier de Lorraine, and others were forming a group in the corner of the apartment; he feared that, prevented from talking aloud, they might discuss in a whisper matters that were best left unsaid. He was, then, with many a distrustful and uneasy glance, appealing to Anne of Austria to put an end, in some way or other, to this cabal, when suddenly Bernouin entered the closet from the back, and whispered in his master's ear:

"Monseigneur, an envoy from his Majesty the King of England."

Mazarin was unable to keep from betraying a slight emotion, which the King at once perceived. To avoid appearing inquisitive, and especially to avoid making public his insignificance, Louis rose immediately, and approaching his Eminence, wished him good-night.

The whole party had risen at the same time the King did, and, what with pushing tables and rolling back chairs, there was a good deal of uproar.

"Let every one depart, but depart gradually," said Mazarin, in an undertone, to the King, "and deign to grant me a few moments. I am busy about a matter to-night, concerning which I should like to have a conversation with your Majesty."

"Do you wish the two queens to leave?" inquired Louis XIV.

"Yes, and M. le Duc d'Orleans also," answered Mazarin.

At the same time he turned out of the bed, which was now hidden by the falling of the curtains. The cardinal, however, never lost sight of the conspirators in the other apartment.

"M. le Comte de Guiche!" he cried, in his quavering voice, while putting on, behind the curtain, the robe de chambre handed him by Bernouin.

"Here I am, monseigneur," answered the young man, advancing.

"Take my cards; you are lucky, you. Try to win me a little money from these gentlemen."

"Yes, monseigneur."

The young man sat down at the table from which the King had arisen to talk with the queens.

Quite a heavy game was then played between the count and several opulent courtiers.

Philippe was discussing matters of dress with the Chevalier

de Lorraine, and all had ceased to hear the rustling of the cardinal's silk robe from behind the curtain.

His Eminence had followed Bernouin into the study adjoining his bedroom.

CHAPTER XL.

AN AFFAIR OF STATE.

When the cardinal passed into his study he found the Comte de la Fère waiting for him and busy admiring a very fine Raphael that hung above a table covered with specimens of the goldsmith's art.

His Eminence came in softly, as light and silent as a shadow, and, as was his habit, he at once attempted to read the count's thoughts in his face; for Mazarin claimed to have the power of knowing from the expression of a visitor's countenance the nature of the conversation that was to ensue.

But in the present instance he failed completely; he could read nothing on the face before him, not even the respect for himself he was accustomed to see on all faces.

Athos had on a black dress, plainly embroidered with silver. He wore the orders of the Holy Ghost, the Garter, and the Golden Fleece, three orders so illustrious that only a king or an actor could wear them at the same time.

Mazarin racked his memory, which was somewhat confused, in the endeavor to recall the name he ought to give to this icy-looking personage, and did not succeed.

"I have been informed," said he, at length, "that a message has arrived from England."

And he took a chair, dismissing Bernouin and Brienne, though the latter had already a pen in his hand, ready to act as secretary.

"From his Majesty the King of England, yes, your Eminence."

"You speak very pure French for an Englishman, monsieur," said Mazarin, graciously, but still eyeing through his fingers the Holy Ghost, the Garter, the Golden Fleece, and, above all, the features of the messenger.

"I am not an Englishman, I am a Frenchman, M. le Cardinal," answered Athos.

"It is rather strange, though, the King of England selecting a Frenchman as one of his ambassadors; but it augurs well for the success of your mission. Your name, if you please, monsieur?"

"Comte de la Fère," replied Athos, with a far slighter inclination than the state and pride of the omnipotent cardinal exacted.

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "I am not acquainted with that name."

Athos did not seem to mind.

"And you have come, monsieur, to announce to me —"

"I have come on the part of his Majesty the King of Great Britain to announce to the King of France —"

Mazarin frowned.

"To announce to the King of France," continued Athos, composedly, "the happy restoration of his Majesty King Charles II. to the throne of his ancestors."

The distinction did not escape his astute Eminence. Mazarin had too keen a knowledge of men not to discern in the glacial and almost contemptuous politeness of Athos a hostility the temperature of which was far higher than that of the hothouse known as the court.

"No doubt you have powers?" he inquired, in a curt, fretful tone.

"Yes, monseigneur."

The word "monseigneur" came so painfully from the lips of Athos that it looked as if it burned them.

"In that case show them to me."

Athos drew a despatch from a little embroidered velvet bag he carried under his doublet. The cardinal stretched out his hand.

"Excuse me, monseigneur," said Athos, "the despatch is for the King."

"As you are a Frenchman, monsieur, you must be aware of the important position held by a prime minister at the court of France."

"There was really a time," answered Athos, "when I did take an interest in the importance of prime ministers, but I formed a resolution several years ago to deal only with the King."

"Then, monsieur," said Mazarin, beginning to wax angry, "you shall see neither the minister nor the King."

And Mazarin rose. Athos immediately thrust back the document into his bag, gravely bowed to Mazarin, and took a few steps toward the door. This coolness exasperated the cardinal.

"What strange diplomatic proceedings are these!" he exclaimed. "Are we still living in the times when Cromwell sent us bravos in the guise of envoys? All you lack, monsieur, is an iron pot on your head and a Bible hanging at your belt."

"Monsieur," retorted Athos, dryly, "unlike yourself, I never had the advantage of treating with Cromwell, and I never encountered his envoys save with a sword in my hand; I am, therefore, ignorant as to his manner of dealing with prime ministers. As for the King of England, I know that when he writes to Louis XIV. he does not write to Cardinal Mazarin. I do not see that it needs any diplomatic skill to make this distinction."

"Ah!" cried Mazarin, raising his cadaverous face and striking his head, "I remember now!"

Athos stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, I have got you!" exclaimed the cardinal, riveting his eyes on the count. "I have you! I recognize you, monsieur. Ah, *diavolo!* I am no longer surprised."

"In fact," said Athos, with a smile, "I have been wondering, considering what an excellent memory you have, that your Eminence did not recognize me before."

"Still the same stiffnecked grumbler — Monsieur — Monsieur — What's this you used to call yourself? Stay a moment — the name of a river — Potamos — no — the name of an island — Naxos — no; *per Giove!* the name of a mountain — Athos! got it at last! Enchanted to see you again, I 'm sure, especially as it is not at Rueil, where you and your damned accomplices held me to ransom. The Fronde! always the Fronde! the infernal Fronde! the old virus still working! And yet, monsieur, how comes it to pass that your antipathies have survived mine? Surely, if any one had reason to complain it was not you, you who got safely out of the business, and with the ribbon of the Holy Ghost at your neck to boot."

"M. le Cardinal," replied Athos, "you must pardon me for refusing to discuss these matters. I have a mission to fulfil. Are you willing to aid me in fulfilling that mission?"

"I am astounded," said Mazarin, who, on recovering his

memory, had also recovered his spirits and was fairly bristling with malicious little points, "I am astounded, M. — Athos — to see a Frondeur like you accept a mission to that rascal Mazarin, as he used to be styled in the good old times — "

And Mazarin broke into a laugh, in spite of a racking cough that cut short his sentences and turned them into sobs.

"The mission I have accepted is to the King of France, and to him alone, M. le Cardinal," answered Athos, but more mildly, for he felt he was the winner in this little passage of arms, and might show himself moderate.

"M. le Frondeur," said Mazarin, gayly, "the business that you have taken on your shoulders must, for all that — "

"That has been put on my shoulders, monseigneur; I do not run after such business."

"Oh, granted! The negotiation, I repeat, must, for all that, pass through my hands. We are wasting precious time — tell me the nature of the proposals."

"I have already had the honor of assuring your Eminence that the letter of his Majesty King Charles II. alone contains the revelation of his wishes."

"Oh, stop! you make yourself ridiculous with your stiffness, M. Athos. It 's easy seeing you have rubbed up a good deal against the Puritans over yonder. Your secret, indeed! I know your secret better than you do, and you might have acted more wisely if you had shown a little more respect for a very old and a very sick man, who has worked bravely during his life, and has waged war bravely for his ideas, as you have done for yours. You will tell me nothing? Good! You will not communicate the contents of your letter to me? Capital! Come along with me into my apartment; you shall speak to the King — and in presence of the King. And now, a last word — who gave you the Golden Fleece? I remember it was supposed you had got the Garter; but as to the Golden Fleece, I was not aware — "

"Spain recently sent, monseigneur, a blank patent of the Fleece to King Charles II. on the occasion of the marriage of King Louis XIV. Charles II. filled up the blank with my name and bestowed it on me."

Mazarin rose and entered his bedroom, leaning on Bernouin's arm, just at the moment when the cry of "M. le Prince!" was heard in the adjoining apartment. The Prince de Condé, first prince of the blood and victor at Rocroi, Lens, and Nord-

lingen, had entered, attended by his gentlemen, and saluted the King when the prime minister raised his curtain.

Athos had time to perceive Raoul shaking hands with the Comte de Guiche and to smile in return for his son's respectful salutation.

He had time also to behold the ecstatic change in the cardinal's countenance at the sight of an enormous pile of gold on the table won by the Comte de Guiche, who had had a run of luck ever since his Eminence had entrusted him with his cards. So, oblivious of ambassador, embassy, and prince, the first thought of the prime minister was for his gold.

"What!" exclaimed the old man, "all that — won!"

"About fifty thousand crowns; yes, monseigneur," said the Comte de Guiche, rising. "Will your Eminence take my place, or shall I continue?"

"Stop! stop at once! You are mad. Confound it, man, do you want to lose all you have gained?"

"Monseigneur," said the Prince de Condé, bowing.

"Good evening, M. le Prince," answered Mazarin, carelessly; "it is very kind of you to pay a visit to a sick friend."

"A friend!" murmured the Comte de la Fère, fairly stupefied at such a monstrous use of the word "friend" — friendship between a Mazarin and a Condé!

The prime minister surmised the thought of this Frondeur, for he smiled at him triumphantly, and forthwith proceeded to address the King.

"Sire," said he, "I have the honor to present to your Majesty M. le Comte de la Fère, ambassador of his Britannic Majesty. An affair of state, gentlemen!" he added, dismissing with a gesture the courtiers present, and at this mere gesture they all vanished, the Prince de Condé at their head.

Raoul, after a last look at his father, followed M. de Condé.

Philippe and the Queen appeared also to be thinking of retiring.

"A family affair," Mazarin said suddenly, motioning them back to their seats. "M. le Comte de la Fère, here present, has brought a letter to the King, in which Charles II., now restored to his throne, asks for an alliance between Monsieur, brother of the King, and Mademoiselle Henrietta, granddaughter of Henri IV. Have the goodness to hand your credentials to the King, M. le Comte."

Athos was for a moment almost petrified. How could the

minister have learned the contents of a letter which had never left his person a single instant? But he quickly recovered his ordinary self-control and handed the despatch to the young monarch, who changed color as he took it. There was solemn silence throughout the vast apartment, a silence that was only disturbed by the dull sound of the gold which the dry, yellow hand of Mazarin poured into a casket while the King was reading.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE NARRATIVE OF ATHOS.

The spiteful intervention of Mazarin did not leave the ambassador a chance of having much to say; still the word "restored" impressed the King strongly, and addressing the count, whom he had been looking at ever since his entrance, he said:

"Be good enough to give us some particulars as to the situation of affairs in England. You are just from England, you are a Frenchman, and the orders I see on your person prove that you are a man of distinction as well as a man of rank."

"This gentleman," said the cardinal, turning to the Queen, "is a former servant of your Majesty, M. le Comte de la Fère."

Anne of Austria, like all queens whose lives have been made up of storm and sunshine, was inclined to be rather forgetful. She stared at Mazarin, whose evil smile foreshadowed some malicious taunt; then she turned to Athos, a question in her eyes.

"He was," continued the cardinal, "a Treville musketeer in the service of the late King. M. le Comte is well acquainted with England, having often journeyed thither at various periods; he is a gentleman of the highest merit."

These words hinted at certain memories, the recollection of which still made Anne of Austria tremble. England meant for her her hatred for Richelieu and her love for Buckingham. A Treville musketeer! — the name was the evocation of all that triumphant Odyssey that had once thrilled her heart, and had nearly upset her throne.

These words had a potent effect; the royal personages present heard them with bated breath and with very different

feelings ; they tried to revive the image of those mysterious years which the young had never seen, and which the old had believed forgotten.

"Speak, monsieur," said Louis, who was the first to break a silence the elements of which were sorrows, suspicions, and memories.

"Yes, speak," added Mazarin, who, after firing off this cynical little insult at Anne of Austria, had recovered all his vigor and gayety.

"Sire," said the count, "a sort of miracle has wrought an entire change in the destiny of Charles II. What men were heretofore unable to effect, God resolved to accomplish."

Mazarin tossed about uneasily on his bed, and coughed.

"King Charles II.," continued Athos, "left the Hague neither like a fugitive nor like a conqueror, but like an absolute monarch, who, after a long absence from his realm, returns amid the universal blessings of his subjects."

"A great miracle, in good truth," observed Mazarin, "for, if the tidings we had were true, King Charles II., now returning amid blessings, had departed amid a hail of musketry."

The King remained impassive.

Philippe, younger and more frivolous, could not repress a smile. The smile flattered Mazarin ; it was a tribute to his wit.

"Yes," said the King, "there has been a miracle. But though God does great things for kings, M. le Comte, he employs the agency of men in the achievement of his purposes. Who are the men to whom Charles II. is chiefly indebted for his restoration ?"

"Why," interrupted the cardinal, careless about wounding the King's self-esteem, "of course, your Majesty must know it is General Monk ?"

"I should know it," said Louis, resolutely, "still I must ask M. l'Ambassadeur the causes of this change in General Monk."

"Your Majesty has exactly touched the point of the question," answered Athos ; "because, save for the miracle of which I have had the honor of speaking, General Monk might have continued to be the inveterate enemy of Charles II. God decreed that a strange, daring, and ingenious idea should flash on the mind of one man, and that a self-sacrificing, venturesome idea should also flash on the mind of another man. The combination of these two ideas produced such an altera-

tion in the position of Monk that the bitter enemy of the fallen King became his devoted friend."

"These are precisely the particulars for which I asked," returned the King. "Who are the men to whom you have alluded?"

"Two Frenchmen, Sire."

"I am really very glad of that."

"And the two ideas?" exclaimed Mazarin. "I take a good deal more interest in ideas than I do in men, for my part."

"Yes," murmured the King.

"The second idea, which was rational as well as self-sacrificing, but not at all as notable as the first, was to unearth a million in gold, buried by King Charles I. in Newcastle, and with this gold to purchase the coöperation of Monk."

"Oh!" cried Mazarin, into whom the mention of a million put new life; "why, Newcastle was at that very time in the hands of Monk."

"Yes, M. le Cardinal; and that is the very reason why I have dared to call the idea a self-sacrificing and venturesome one. Should Monk refuse the offers of the negotiator the important question was to persuade him to consent to the restoration of that million to Charles II., who would then be indebted for it to the loyalty rather than to the loyalism of the parliamentary general. In spite of some difficulties this was effected; Monk was loyal and allowed the gold to be carried away."

"Yet," said the King, timidly and pensively, "I am inclined to believe that Charles II. had no knowledge of this million during his stay in Paris."

"And I am inclined to think," added the cardinal, maliciously, "that his Majesty the King of Great Britain was perfectly aware of the existence of the million, but preferred two millions to one."

"Sire," answered Athos, firmly, "so poor was his Majesty King Charles II. during his residence in France that he had not money enough to hire post-horses; so poor in hope that he thought several times of dying. So little was he aware of the existence of the million at Newcastle that, but for a gentleman, one of your Majesty's subjects, and the moral trustee of that million, who revealed the secret to Charles II., that prince might still be languishing in misery and oblivion."

"Yes, but this strange, daring, and ingenious idea," in-

terrupted the cardinal, whose sagacity foreboded a check, "let us have it."

"The idea was this. As General Monk was the only obstacle to the restoration of the dethroned monarch, a Frenchman conceived the idea of removing that obstacle."

"Oho! so this Frenchman of yours was a scoundrel," said Mazarin, "and, however ingenious you may think the idea, it should not save its author from being hanged or broken alive on the Grève by decree of parliament."

"Your Eminence is in error," returned Athos, dryly; "I have said the Frenchman in question intended, not the assassination, but the removal of Monk. Words in the French language have a value wherewith French gentlemen are perfectly acquainted. Besides, this was an act of war, and God, not a parliament, is the judge of those who help kings against their enemies. This French gentleman, then, purposed to get possession of General Monk's person, and he executed his purpose."

The narration of noble deeds always thrilled the King.

His young brother struck his clenched fist on the table, crying:

"Ah! that was grand!"

"He carried off Monk?" asked the King. "But Monk was in his camp—"

"And the gentleman was alone, Sire."

"Marvellous!" said Philippe.

"Marvellous, in good truth!" exclaimed the King.

"Capital! the two lion's whelps unchained now!" muttered the cardinal.

And with an air of vexation he did not care to hide:

"I was ignorant of these details," said he; "do you guarantee their authenticity, monsieur?"

"The more readily, M. le Cardinal, since I was a witness of them."

"You?"

"I, monseigneur."

The King involuntarily approached the count; the Duc d'Anjou turned quickly round and pressed close on the other side of Athos.

"What next, monsieur?" cried both in unison.

"Sire, after General Monk was captured by the Frenchman, he was conducted to Charles II. at the Hague. The King re-

stored Monk his liberty, and the grateful general restored the King his throne, that throne in defence of which so many heroes have vainly fought."

Philippe clapped his hands enthusiastically; Louis XIV., of a more thoughtful temper, turned to the Comte de la Fère.

"All the particulars you have related are quite true?" said he.

"Absolutely true, Sire."

"One of my gentlemen knew the secret of this million, then, and kept it?"

"Yes, Sire."

"The gentleman's name?"

"Is that of your humble servant, Sire," said Athos simply.

The murmur of admiration that arose was calculated to rejoice the heart of the count. He might well feel proud of it, and he did. Even Mazarin raised his arms to heaven.

"Monsieur," said the King, "I must seek, I must try to discover some way of rewarding you."

Athos started.

"Oh, not for your disinterestedness; a reward for that would be a humiliation; but I certainly consider myself indebted to you for the share you have taken in the restoration of my brother Charles II."

"Certainly," said Mazarin.

"The triumph of so noble a cause fills the whole house of France with joy," said Anne of Austria.

"A further question," continued Louis XIV. "It is really a fact, then, that a single man penetrated into Monk's camp and carried him off?"

"He had ten auxiliaries recruited from among the lower classes."

"No more?"

"No more."

"And his name is?"

"M. d'Artagnan, ex-lieutenant of musketeers to your Majesty."

Anne of Austria colored. Mazarin turned yellow with shame. Louis XIV.'s face grew dark and a drop of perspiration fell from his pale forehead.

"What men!" he murmured.

And involuntarily he flashed a glance at Mazarin that must have frightened that minister if he had not had his head buried in his pillow at the time.

"Monsieur," said the young Duc d'Anjou, laying his hand — as white and delicate as a woman's — on the count's arm, "tell that brave man, if you please, that Monsieur, the brother of the King, intends drinking his health to-morrow in the presence of a hundred of the best gentlemen in France."

And just then the young prince saw that in his enthusiasm he had disarranged one of his ruffles, and set about putting it to rights with the greatest energy.

"Now let us talk of business, Sire," said Mazarin, who was not enthusiastic and did not wear ruffles.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Louis XIV.; "communicate to us the purpose of your mission, M. le Comte," he added, turning to Athos.

Athos did so, offering in due form the hand of the Princess Henrietta Stuart to the younger brother of the King.

The conference lasted an hour; then the doors of the apartment were flung open, and the courtiers resumed their places as quietly as if they were unaware that any of the night's proceedings had been withheld from their knowledge.

Athos soon found himself close to Raoul, and father and son again clasped hands.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN WHICH MAZARIN BECOMES A SPENDTHRIFT!

While Mazarin was doing his best to recover from the very serious alarm he had just felt, Athos and Raoul were conversing in a corner of the apartment.

"So you are now in Paris, Raoul?" said the count.

"Yes, monsieur, ever since the return of M. le Prince."

"I cannot talk with you here, where every one is looking at us, but I am going home immediately, and shall expect you when you are off duty."

Raoul bowed. M. le Prince came straight up to them.

The prince had the clear, penetrating eyes of the noble birds of prey; even the rest of his physiognomy presented characteristics that assimilated him to the same species. We know that his aquiline nose stood out sharply and saliently from a forehead that was rather retreating and rather low than lofty;

which gave rise to a saying among the wits at court — a race merciless even to genius — that the heir of the illustrious princes of the house of Condé had, instead of a human nose, the beak of an eagle.

The piercing look, the imperious expression of the entire countenance, exercised usually a more confusing effect on those he addressed than did either the majesty or the classic beauty of the conqueror of Rocroi. Moreover, those prominent eyes of his became so easily inflamed that when he was merely a little excited he seemed in a towering rage. Now, while every one at court respected M. le Prince on account of his rank, the feeling of many, who were only acquainted with his exterior, passed beyond respect and became terror.

Louis de Condé, as we have stated, came up to the Comte de la Fère and Raoul, with the evident intention of being saluted by one of them and of addressing the other.

No one bowed with more reserved grace than the Comte de la Fère. He disdained to embellish a salutation with all those tints which a courtier ordinarily borrows from the same color-board: the desire of pleasing. Athos knew his own value, and saluted the man in the prince, toning down by the aid of a certain sympathetic and elusive quality all that could be offensive to pride of rank in the inflexibility of his attitude.

The prince was about to speak to Raoul. Athos forestalled him.

"If M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne," said he, "were not one of your Highness's humblest servants, I would beg him to present me, prince."

"I have the honor, then, of addressing M. le Comte de la Fère," said M. de Condé, immediately.

"My protector," added Raoul, coloring.

"One of the truest gentlemen in the realm," continued the prince, "and one of the most distinguished gentlemen in it, also, — a gentleman whom I have heard so highly lauded that I have often desired to number him among my friends."

"An honor of which, monseigneur," replied Athos, "my respect and admiration for your Highness alone render me worthy."

"M. de Bragelonne," said the prince, "is a good officer who, it can be seen, has been brought up in a good school. Ah! monsieur, in your time generals had soldiers — "

"True, monseigneur; but to-day soldiers have generals."

This compliment, which smacked but little of flattery, sent a thrill of joy through the veins of a man whom all Europe regarded as a hero, and who might now be supposed to be fairly satiated with praise.

"I experience a sort of personal regret at finding that you have retired from the service, M. le Comte, for it will not be long until the King has a war on his hands, either with England or Holland, and, certainly, a man like you, who knows England as well as he does France, would not lack opportunities for winning distinction."

"I think I may as well tell your Highness that I have done wisely in retiring from the service," answered Athos, smiling. "France and England are going to live like two sisters henceforth; or else I am out in my forecasts."

"Your forecasts?"

"Hold, monseigneur; just listen to what they are saying yonder at the cardinal's table."

"At the table where they 're playing?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

The cardinal was leaning on his elbow and had beckoned to the King's brother to come to him.

"Monseigneur," said he, "oblige me by picking up all the crowns you see there."

And he pointed to the enormous pile of bright yellow coins the Comte de Guiche had been able, by his extraordinary run of luck, to build up a little before.

"All these mine?" cried the Duc d'Anjou.

"There are fifty thousand crowns there; yes, monseigneur, they are yours."

"You give them to me?"

"I played on your account, monseigneur," answered the cardinal, growing gradually weaker, as if the effort he was making to give away all that money had exhausted his faculties, both of mind and body.

"Great heavens!" gasped Philippe, almost stunned with joy, "was there ever such a day!"

And raking in the coins with his fingers, he filled all his pockets; but at least a third of the sum was still left on the table.

"Chevalier," shouted Philippe to his favorite, the Chevalier de Lorraine, "come here."

The favorite ran up.

"Pocket the rest," said the young prince.

This scene was regarded by all the spectators as simply a rather touching family incident. The cardinal had always assumed the air of a father to the children of France, and the two young princes had grown up under his wing. In our days such generosity on the part of a prime minister would be considered a sign of arrogance, a downright impertinence; but no one thought so then.

The only sentiment of the courtiers was envy — the King turned away his head.

"I never had so much money in my life," cried the young prince gayly, crossing the apartment with his favorite on the way to his carriage. "No, never. What a weight these hundred and fifty thousand livres are!"

"But why does the cardinal part with such a sum all at one stroke?" asked the Prince de Condé of the Comte de la Fère. "My dear friend really must be very ill."

"Yes, monseigneur, I have no doubt he is very ill; besides, you can see for yourself how sick he looks."

"Yes, he does, certainly. But this will kill him outright — a hundred and fifty thousand livres! Oh, it 's utterly incredible! Come, now, count, why did he do it? Try and give a reason."

"Just a little patience, monseigneur, if you please. Here comes the Duc d'Anjou, talking with the Chevalier de Lorraine. I should not be at all surprised if they spared us the remorse of committing an indiscretion. Listen to them."

Indeed, at this moment the chevalier said to the prince, in an undertone:

"Monseigneur, it is not natural that the cardinal should give you so much money. Take care or you 'll drop some of the pieces, Monseigneur. What does he want to get out of you in return for such generosity?"

"Just as I hinted," whispered Athos in the prince's ear; "you have now, perhaps, the answer to your question."

"Why don't you answer, Monseigneur?" impatiently asked the chevalier, who was endeavoring to measure the amount of the money in his pockets indirectly by feeling the coins.

"My dear chevalier, it is a wedding present."

"A what? a wedding present!"

"Yes, I am about to be married," replied the Duc d'Anjou,

not perceiving that he was then passing in front of M. le Prince and Athos, both of whom bowed profoundly.

The chevalier darted at him a look so strange and malignant that the Comte de la Fère was startled.

"You get married? you?" he repeated. "Oh, that's not possible. You to commit such a folly as that!"

"Pshaw! I don't do it of my own free will; I'm forced to do it," replied the prince. "But let us be off, or we'll never be able to get rid of our money."

Thereupon he disappeared, laughing and chatting with his companion, while every head was bent on his passage out.

After he had gone M. le Prince said to Athos, in an undertone:

"So that was the secret, then?"

"I did not tell you it was, monseigneur."

"He is going to marry the sister of Charles II.?"

"I think so."

The prince reflected a moment and fire flashed from his eyes.

"Well, well," said he slowly and as if he were speaking to himself, "we may as well hang up our swords again — for how long, I wonder!"

And he sighed.

Athos alone had heard the sigh, and he alone could conjecture all the stifled ambitions, dead illusions, and blasted hopes that were contained in that sigh.

M. le Prince soon took his leave; the King retired also.

Athos made a sign to Raoul, which was a renewal of the invitation given to him at the beginning of this scene.

The apartment was gradually deserted, and Mazarin was alone, a victim to pangs of suffering he no longer cared to hide.

"Bernouin! Bernouin!" he cried, in a broken voice.

"What do you wish, monseigneur?"

"Guénaud — send for Guénaud," said his Eminence. "I really believe I am going to die."

Bernouin, scared out of his wits, ran to the study to give an order, and the groom who galloped for the doctor passed the King's carriage in the Rue Saint-Honoré.

CHAPTER XLIII.

GUÉNAUD.

The cardinal's order was urgent; Guénaud obeyed it immediately.

He found his patient stretched on his back, his face livid, his legs swollen, and his stomach fallen in. Mazarin had just had a violent fit of the gout. He suffered cruelly, and the impatience perhaps natural to a man unused to meet with resistance added to his sufferings. When he saw Guénaud enter:

"Ah!" he cried, "now I am saved!"

Guénaud was a very learned and a very prudent man, who would have gained fame though Boileau had never spoken of him. When in presence of a disease, even when that disease was personified in a king, he treated his patient with as much indifference as if he were a Turk or a Moor. He did not give the answer to Mazarin that the minister expected: "Now that the doctor is here, good-bye to the disease!" On the contrary, after examining the patient with an air of great gravity:

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed.

"What ails you, Guénaud? How strange you look!"

"I look as I should look, monseigneur, in presence of such a serious case."

"Oh, yes, the gout — the gout, of course."

"Ah! but with complications, monseigneur."

Mazarin rose on his elbow, questioning both with eye and gesture as well as with his lips.

"What is this you tell me? Am I worse than I think I am myself?"

"Monseigneur," said Guénaud, sitting near the bed, "your Eminence has toiled and suffered much during your life."

"But I am not so old, as far as I can see. The late M. de Richelieu was only seventeen months younger than I am when he died, and his disease was mortal. I am young, Guénaud; why, only consider; I am hardly fifty-two."

"Oh, monseigneur, you are much more than that. How long did the Fronde last?"

"But what is your object in asking me such a question, Guénaud?"

"I want to make a certain medical calculation, monseigneur."

"Well, say, about ten years — at one time strong; at another, weak."

"Good. Reckon each year of the Fronde as three. That makes thirty. But add twenty to fifty-two, and you have seventy-two years, monseigneur. Seventy-two is a great age."

While speaking, he felt the sick man's pulse. The state of the pulse was so ominous that, in spite of his patient's interruptions, the doctor continued his remarks.

"I see," said he, "that we must regard every year of the Fronde as four years; and so you have lived eighty-two years, monseigneur."

Mazarin turned very pale and whispered, in a voice that could scarcely be heard:

"Are you speaking seriously, Guénaud?"

"Alas! yes, monseigneur."

"You have taken a very roundabout way of informing me that I am a very sick man."

"Yes, monseigneur, I confess I have done so, and I see that, with a man of your Eminence's genius and courage, there was no need for me to adopt such a course."

The cardinal's breathing grew so hard that even the pitiless physician relented.

"All diseases are not alike," resumed Mazarin. "There are diseases from which men recover."

"Very true, monseigneur."

"You agree with me, then?" cried Mazarin, almost joyfully. "Really, what would be the use of possessing resolution and strength of will — what would be the use of genius, such genius as yours, Guénaud — in a word, what is the use of science and art, if a sick man who has all these at his command cannot be saved from danger?"

Guénaud tried to speak, but Mazarin continued:

"Just only consider that I have trusted in you more than has any of your patients, that I obey you blindly, and that consequently —"

"I am aware of all that," said Guénaud.

"Then you will cure me?"

"Monseigneur, neither resolution nor strength of will nor genius nor science is of any avail against diseases sent by God now, or scattered over the earth at creation, and empowered

to destroy and slay men. When a disease is mortal, it kills, and there is no help for it —"

"My disease — is — mortal?" asked Mazarin.

"Yes, monseigneur."

His Eminence sank down for a moment, feeling as utterly crushed as some poor wretch upon whom a pillar has just fallen. But Mazarin had a vigorous soul, or, rather, a finely tempered and strenuous mind.

"Guénaud," said he, trying to sit up, "you will not be offended if I appeal from your judgment. I will assemble the most learned men in Europe, and consult them. In a word, I am determined to live, no matter what may be the nature of the remedy employed."

"Surely, monseigneur, you do not believe that I have been so presumptuous as to have pronounced judgment on a life so precious as yours by my own unaided science. I have already consulted the best physicians and practitioners in Europe — there are twelve."

"And they said?"

"That your Eminence was in the clutches of a mortal disease. I have the signed results of this consultation in my portfolio. Here they are. If your Eminence care to examine them you will see the names of all the incurable diseases that we have been able to discover. There is first —"

"No! no!" cried Mazarin, thrusting back the papers, "I surrender; I surrender!"

And a deep silence, during which the cardinal became stronger in mind and body, replaced the excitement that had hitherto marked the scene.

"And yet," murmured Mazarin, "there might be another resource; there are empirics and charlatans. In my country those whom the doctors abandon have recourse to venders of orvietan; for every ten they kill they cure a hundred."

"Has not your Eminence observed that during the last month I changed your remedies ten times?"

"Yes. What then?"

"Well, I have spent fifty thousand livres in buying the secrets of all these rascals. The list is exhausted; my purse also. You are not cured, and but for my art, you would now be dead."

"It 's all over," murmured the cardinal; "it's all over."

He glanced gloomily at the wealth around him.

"I must give up all this," he sighed. "I am as good as dead, Guénaud, as good as dead!"

"Oh! not yet, monseigneur," said the doctor.

Mazarin seized his hand.

"But when?" he inquired, with his eyes riveted on the impassive face of the physician.

"Monseigneur, we never tell that."

"To ordinary men, granted; but to me — to me, whose every moment is worth a treasure, tell it to me, Guénaud, tell it to me!"

"No, no, monseigneur."

"I insist on your doing so, I say. Oh! grant me but a month, and for each of that month's thirty days I will give you a hundred thousand livres."

"Monseigneur," answered Guénaud, firmly, "the only being who can grant you days of grace is God, not I; and God grants you but a fortnight!"

The cardinal fetched a grievous sigh and fell back upon his pillow, murmuring:

"Thanks, Guénaud, thanks!"

The doctor was getting ready to depart; the dying man rose partially up.

"Silence!" said he, with eyes of flame, "silence!"

"Monseigneur, I have known this secret for two months; you see that I have kept it well."

"Go now, Guénaud, I will take care of your fortunes; go and tell Brienne to send me my clerk; let M. Colbert be summoned. Go!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

COLBERT.

Colbert was not far away. During the whole evening he had remained in one of the corridors, conversing with Bernouin and Brienne, and discussing, with the shrewdness of people having some connection with the court, the news that exploded on the surface of each event like air-bubbles on water. The time has undoubtedly arrived for us to draw in a few words the portrait of one of the most interesting men of the seventeenth

century, and, perhaps, to draw it with as much truth as the artists of the time could have succeeded in doing.

Colbert was a man upon whom historian and moralist have an equal claim. He was thirteen years older than Louis XIV., his future master. He was of medium height, more inclined to be thin than to be stout; he had deep-set eyes, a vulgar mien, and hair coarse, black, and scanty, which, according to the biographies of his time, was the reason why he wore the clerical skullcap at a very early age. His look was austere, nay, stern. He was unbending with his inferiors, from pride, and with his superiors from a desire to affect superior virtue. He had an arrogant expression on his features even when looking at himself in a mirror. So much for the outward appearance of this famous personage.

As for the inner man, his extraordinary talents for accounts and his astuteness in rendering even sterility productive were highly praised.

Colbert had drawn up a plan for forcing the governors of the fortresses on the frontier to maintain their garrisons from the proceeds of the taxes they raised, without requiring aid from the public treasury. Such an exhibition of cleverness led Mazarin, when Joubert, his intendant, died, to offer the post to Colbert, who had shown such skill in cutting down allowances.

Colbert, after a time, obtained a footing at court, in spite of his humble birth, for he was the son of a man who had once — like his own father before him — sold wine, though he afterward dealt in cloth, and then in silks.

Colbert had been intended for commerce, and was for a time clerk to a merchant in Lyons. He threw up his position and came to Paris, where he got employment in the office of an attorney of the Châtelet named Biterne. There he learned the art of drawing up an account, and the still more valuable one of complicating one.

The very harshness of Colbert had been of the greatest service to him, so true it is that fortune, when capricious, resembles those women of antiquity, whose imagination was not shocked by any kind of moral or physical repulsiveness in men or things. Colbert, who had obtained a position in the office of Michel Letellier, secretary of state in 1648, through his cousin and patron, Colbert, Seigneur de Saint-Pouange, one day received a commission from the minister for Cardinal Mazarin.

His Eminence at that time was in robust health; the evil days of the Fronde had not yet quadrupled his years. He was at Sedan, very much embarrassed by a court intrigue, and Anne of Austria was seemingly inclined to desert his cause.

Now, Letellier held all the threads of this intrigue.

He had just received a letter from Anne of Austria, a letter very valuable to him, and very dangerous to Mazarin. But as he was already playing the double part which served him so well, — for he always managed two enemies so skilfully that he turned both to good account, either by increasing their mutual hatred or effecting a reconciliation between them, — Michel Letellier wished to forward Anne of Austria's letter to Mazarin, in order that the cardinal might become acquainted with its contents, and afterwards show his gratitude for a service so honestly rendered.

To send the letter was easy enough; to recover it after its contents were made known — that was the difficulty. Letellier glanced round, and seeing a lean, dark, scowling clerk scribbling away in his office, he pitched on him as a fellow that would execute his purpose better than a gendarme.

Colbert was ordered to start for Sedan, communicate the contents of the letter to Mazarin, and bring it back to Letellier.

He listened to the instructions given him with scrupulous attention, required the substance of them to be repeated twice, and insisted on learning which was more important: communicating the contents of the letter or returning with it. Letellier said:

"Its safe return is far more important."

Then Colbert started, travelled like a courier who does not spare himself, and handed Mazarin a note from Letellier informing him that the precious letter had been sent; next, the letter itself.

Mazarin grew very red while reading Anne of Austria's letter, smiled graciously at Colbert, and dismissed him.

"When shall I have an answer, monseigneur?" inquired the courier, humbly.

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow morning?"

"Yes, monsieur."

The clerk turned on his heels, after making the best bow he knew how.

The next day he was at his post at seven. Mazarin made him wait till ten. Colbert stayed, quite composedly, in the antechamber; his turn came and he entered.

Mazarin confided to him a sealed packet. Upon the envelope were these words: "To M. Michel Letellier," etc.

Colbert examined the packet attentively. The cardinal treated him most courteously and pushed him gently toward the door.

"But the queen-mother's letter, monseigneur?" asked Colbert.

"It is with the others, in the packet," answered Mazarin.

"Ah, very well," replied Colbert.

And he began to break the seals of the packet, after placing his hat between his knees.

Mazarin uttered a cry.

"What are you doing there?" said he, roughly.

"Breaking the seals of the packet, monseigneur."

"Do you distrust me, you pettifogging knave? Who ever heard of such impertinence!"

"Oh, monseigneur, please do not be angry with me. I do not for a moment doubt your Eminence's word, God forbid!"

"Then what do you mean by your conduct?"

"I have not the same confidence in the carefulness of your clerks, monseigneur. What is a letter? a mere trifle. Is it not easy to forget a trifle? And, look, monseigneur, look, see now if I was wrong! Your clerks forgot the trifle: the letter is not in the packet."

"You are an insolent scoundrel, and have not examined the packet at all," cried the angry minister; "retire and await my good pleasure!"

While saying these words, with a subtlety quite Italian, he snatched the packet from Colbert's hand and returned into his apartment. But his anger could not last forever, and common sense soon took the place of it.

Every morning, on opening the door of his study, Mazarin found Colbert standing like a sentry behind the bench, found there a most unpleasant face that demanded, humbly but obstinately, the queen-mother's letter.

Mazarin could not hold out, he had to surrender. He accompanied the restitution with a good deal of rough abuse, during which Colbert was examining, turning over, actually smelling the paper, characters, and signature, just the same as if he

were dealing with the meanest forger in the kingdom. Mazarin railed at him still more bitterly, and when the phlegmatic Colbert had acquired the certainty that he had the genuine letter, he took his leave with the air of a man who is deaf.

This conduct of his afterward won for him the post left vacant by Joubert's death, for Mazarin, so far from entertaining any rancorous feelings in his regard, admired his fidelity, and determined to bind him to himself.

This little story will give the reader some idea of Colbert's disposition. Events will, in the course of our narrative, allow free scope for the gradual development of his character.

It did not take Colbert long to win the good graces of the cardinal, and eventually he became indispensable to him. The clerk knew all the cardinal's accounts without the cardinal ever having to speak about them. This secret was a powerful bond between them, and so Mazarin, before making his appearance before the master of the next world, wished to have Colbert's aid and advice in disposing of the property he was forced to leave behind him in the present world.

After Guénaud's visit, then, he called for Colbert, bade him be seated, and said:

"Let us talk, M. Colbert, and talk seriously; I am very sick and may possibly die."

"Man is mortal," answered Colbert.

"A fact I have always remembered, and have always had before my mind when working, M. Colbert. You are aware that I have amassed a small amount of property — "

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Can you give an approximate estimate of its value?"

"Forty million five hundred and sixty thousand two hundred livres, nine sous and eight deniers," replied Colbert.

The cardinal heaved a deep sigh and looked at Colbert admiringly; but he ventured to smile also.

"Property known," added Colbert, as a sort of response to the smile.

The cardinal actually bounded in his bed.

"What do you mean by that?" said he.

"I mean," answered Colbert, "that beside the forty million five hundred and sixty thousand two hundred livres, nine sous and eight deniers, there are thirteen millions of which nothing is known."

"Ugh!" sighed Mazarin, "what a man!"

At this moment the head of Bernouin appeared in the doorway.

"What is the matter?" inquired Mazarin, "and why am I disturbed?"

"Your Eminence's confessor, the Theatine father, was invited to see you to-night; and he cannot return to visit you until the day after to-morrow, monseigneur."

Mazarin looked at Colbert, who immediately took up his hat, saying:

"I will return to-morrow, monseigneur."

Mazarin hesitated.

"No, no," said he, "I have quite as much business with you as I have with him. Besides, you are my other confessor, and that which I say to one the other may hear. Remain where you are, Colbert."

"But, monseigneur, as there is a certain secrecy attached to the sacrament of penance, do you believe your confessor will be willing that I should remain here?"

"Do not let that trouble you; you can stay there behind the curtains."

"But I could remain outside, monseigneur."

"No, no, it is better for you to stay where you can hear the confession of a rich man."

Colbert bowed and passed behind the curtain.

"Show the Theatine father in," said Mazarin, dropping the curtains he held in his hand.

CHAPTER XLV.

A RICH MAN'S CONFESSION.

The Theatine entered quietly, not showing any great surprise at the confusion and excitement created among the household by the anxiety felt as to the cardinal's condition.

"Come, father," said Mazarin, after a last look toward the curtains at the bedside, "come and try to ease my mind."

"It is my duty to do so, monseigneur," answered the Theatine.

"Begin, then, by sitting down comfortably, for I intend making a general confession. You will afterwards give me full absolution, and I shall feel more tranquil."

"Monseigneur," answered the reverend father, "you are not so ill as to need to make a general confession — you would find it very fatiguing; so consider the matter carefully."

"You fancy it would be rather long, father?"

"How could I think otherwise, seeing that your life has ranged through so many fields."

"Ah, true — yes, it would, perhaps, be long."

"The mercy of God is great," muttered the Theatine.

"Hold on. Why, I am already beginning to be frightened," said Mazarin, "when I think of all the things I have allowed to be accomplished which the Lord would condemn."

"Is not that always the case?" said the Theatine, simply, pushing the lamp away from his thin, angular face. "Is not that always the way with sinners? — forgetful at one period of their lives, and scrupulous when it is too late?"

"Sinners (*pécheurs*), do you say?" answered Mazarin. "Do you use the word as a sort of ironical reproach on account of all the genealogies I have caused to be drawn up — I who am, in reality, only the son of a poor fisherman (*pêcheur*)."[1]

"Hum!" murmured the Theatine.

"Yes, that is my first sin, reverend father; for, in short, I have permitted these genealogists to trace back my origin to two ancient Roman consuls, Titus Gegenius Macerinus primus, Macerinus secundus, and Proculus Macerinus tertius, mentioned in the chronicle of Haolander — Macerinus is so like Mazarin that the temptation was strong. Macerinus is a diminutive, and means a meagre little fellow. Ah! reverend father, Mazarini might well be employed to-day as an augmentative, and might signify terribly meagre, as meagre as Lazarus — Look!" and he pointed to his skinny arms and his legs emaciated by fever.

"To be born of a family of fishermen is in no way degrading, so far as I can see," returned the Theatine. "St. Peter was a fisherman, and though you, monseigneur, may be a prince of the church, he was its supreme head. Pass on, if you please."

"Yes, for, after all, I threatened a certain Avignon priest named Bounet with the Bastille, for wanting to publish a marvellous genealogy of the *Casa Mazarini* —"

"Perhaps too marvellous to be probable?" interrupted the Theatine.

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[1] An execrable pun upon the words *pécheur*, sinner, and *pêcheur*, fisherman. Indeed, a good deal of what follows is equally insipid. — T.

"Oh, if that has been my motive for acting, I have committed another sin, a sin of pride."

"It simply showed you had common sense, and that is a sort of fault for which men are rarely blamed. Pass on, pass on."

"Well, so much for the vice of pride — you see, father, I am going through the seven capital sins in order, and have now divided pride from the rest."

"I like divisions when judiciously made."

"I am glad of that. I ought to tell you that in 1630 — alas! just thirty-one years ago!"

"You were then twenty-nine, monseigneur."

"A reckless age. I aped the soldier and flung myself into a hail of musketry at Casal, to prove I was as good a horseman as any officer of them all. True, I brought peace to the Spaniards and French. That somewhat redeems my sin."

"I cannot see that you committed the least sin in proving that you were a good horseman," said the Theatine. "You acted with perfect propriety, and did honor to our robe. As a Christian, I approve of your effort to stop the effusion of blood; as a monk, I am proud of the bravery exhibited by one of my brethren."

Mazarin bent his head humbly.

"Yes," said he, "but the consequences!"

"What consequences?"

"Oh, that infernal sin of pride has endless roots. Ever since I threw myself, in the fashion I have described, between the two armies, ever since I smelled powder and rode through lines of soldiers, I have looked with a certain amount of scorn upon our generals."

"Ah!"

"That is the evil of it, you see; I have not been able to endure a single one of them ever since those days."

"To be sure," murmured the Theatine, "the generals we have had since have not been particularly clever."

"Oh!" cried Mazarin, "what do you say to M. le Prince? — and I have done all I possibly could to embarrass him!"

"He is not so much to be pitied, he has won glory and a fair amount of wealth."

"Well, let us leave M. le Prince. But what about M. de Beaufort? See the length of time I have let him languish in the keep of Vincennes!"

"Why, he was a rebel, and the safety of the state exacted the sacrifice from you. Pass on."

"I think I have exhausted pride. There is another sin which I dread even to name —"

"Give me the facts. I will name the sin for you."

"A very great sin, father."

"We 'll see."

"You cannot have avoided hearing of certain relations I was supposed to have had with — her Majesty the queen-mother. Ill-natured persons have —"

"Those ill-natured persons, monseigneur, are fools. Did not the good of the state and the interests of the King require that you should live on the best terms with the queen-mother? Pass on, pass on."

"I assure you you have taken a terrible weight off my shoulders."

"These are the veriest trifles! Let us come to serious matters."

"I have been very ambitious, father."

"The desire to be a controlling factor in managing great events is not a crime, monseigneur."

"But I even aimed at the tiara."

"To be Pope is to be the first of Christians — why should you not desire that?"

"But pamphlets were published in which it was said that, to achieve that object, I sold Cambrai to the Spaniards."

"You have, perhaps, written pamphlets yourself in your time, and ought to know what pamphleteers are."

"Then, reverend father, I have made a clean breast of everything, and nothing is left but trivial peccadilloes."

"What are they?"

"Play."

"A rather worldly amusement. But your elevated rank compelled you to keep a good house."

"I liked to win —"

"No player likes to lose."

"I was rather fond of overreaching other players."

"You took your advantage. Pass on."

"Well, father, my conscience troubles me about nothing else. Give me absolution, and, when God calls me, my soul will mount to his throne without meeting any impediment on the way."

The Theatine moved neither arms nor lips.

"What are you waiting for, reverend father?" inquired Mazarin.

"I am waiting until you finish."

"Finish what?"

"Your confession, monseigneur."

"But I have finished it."

"Oh, no! Your Eminence is mistaken."

"Not that I know of."

"Search diligently."

"I searched all I could."

"Then I must aid your memory."

"Do so."

The Theatine coughed several times.

"You have not spoken a word," said he, "about avarice, which is also one of the capital sins, nor of those millions of yours."

"What millions, father?"

"Those you possess, monseigneur."

"Father, this money is mine. Why, then, should I speak of it?"

"Because, you see, we have different opinions. You say the money is yours, and I believe some of it belongs to others."

Mazarin lifted his cold hand to his forehead, which was covered with perspiration.

"This is how the matter stands. Your Eminence has made a good deal of money in the King's service —"

"Humph! a good deal — but not a great deal."

"Be it much or little, where did it come from?"

"From the state."

"And the King is the state."

"But what do you deduce from all this, reverend father?" asked Mazarin, beginning to tremble.

"I can deduce nothing unless I have a list of your possessions. But let us reckon up a little, if you please. You have the bishopric of Metz?"

"Yes."

"The Abbeys of Saint-Clément, Saint-Arnoud, and Saint-Vincent, all at Metz?"

"Yes."

"You have the Abbey of Saint-Denis in France, a fine property?"

"Yes, father."

"You have the rich Abbey of Cluny?"

"I have."

"And that of Saint-Médard at Soissons, which brings you in a revenue of a hundred thousand livres?"

"I do not deny it."

"And the Abbey of Saint-Victor at Marseilles, one of the best in the south?"

"Yes, father."

"A good million a year. With the emoluments of your cardinalate and your ministry, I am rather under the mark when I state that you have an income of two millions a year."

"You are a good accountant — for a Theatine!"

"Ever since your Eminence gave us the convent we occupy near Saint-Germain des Prés, in 1644, I have kept the accounts of the order."

"And mine, too, from what I see, reverend father."

"It does no harm, monseigneur, to know all one can."

"Yes, but what conclusion have you come to in my case?"

"My conclusion is that your luggage is too heavy to pass through the gates of Paradise."

"You mean I shall be damned?"

"Unless you make restitution, yes."

Mazarin uttered a lamentable cry.

"Make restitution! But in the name of Heaven, to whom?"

"To the real owner of the money, the King!"

"But it was the King who gave it to me!"

"One moment! Is it the King who signs the orders for the payment of these sums?"

The sighs and groans of Mazarin were heart-breaking.

"Absolution!" cried he.

"Impossible, monseigneur," answered the Theatine. "There must first be restitution."

"But you have absolved me from my other sins; why not from this one?"

"Because if I absolved you for the reason you have assigned, I should be committing a sin from which the King could, certainly, never absolve me."

Thereupon the confessor left his penitent. He looked very much discouraged, but passed out in the same manner he had entered.

"O God! O God!" groaned the cardinal. "Hello, there! Come here, Colbert — Ah! I am very sick, my friend!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DONATION.

Colbert's head appeared between the curtains.

"Did you hear?" said Mazarin.

"Alas! yes, monseigneur."

"Is he right? Has all that money been acquired dishonestly?"

"A Theatine is but a poor judge of financial matters, monseigneur," answered Colbert, dryly. "Still, from a theological point of view your Eminence may have, to some extent, strayed from the path of rectitude. We all feel that we have made mistakes — when we are at the point of death."

"The greatest mistake of all is to be at the point of death."

"Very true, monseigneur. But whom has the Theatine accused you of wronging? the King?"

Mazarin shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as if I had not been the savior of his state and finances."

"There cannot be the slightest doubt as to that, monseigneur."

"You agree with me? Then my confessor may say what he likes; I have received only a salary, which I have fully and lawfully earned."

"That is beyond contradiction."

"And there is no reason why I should not bequeath to my family — most of whom are needy — a fair share, or even the whole of what I have earned?"

"I cannot see why you should not, monseigneur."

"I was quite sure, Colbert, that if I consulted you, you would give me good advice," answered Mazarin, very much elated.

"Monseigneur," interrupted Colbert, assuming an air of pedantic bluntness, "it would be desirable first to discover whether the Theatine has not been setting a trap for you."

"A trap! Why? The Theatine is an honest man."

"He must have believed your Eminence in the jaws of death, since otherwise your Eminence would have hardly sent for him. Did I not hear him say to you: 'You must make a distinction between what the King has given you and what you

have given to yourself'? Try to remember, monseigneur, did he not say something like that? It is just like what a Theatine would say."

"Possibly."

"In that case I should regard you as, to some extent, called upon to weigh the monk's words and to — "

"Make restitution?" cried Mazarin, warming up.

"I do not say but that it might be best."

"What! restore the whole? You do not mean it — you would be as bad as the confessor."

"No, but to restore a part, to make, as it were, a sacrifice, in favor of his Majesty; and that also may be attended with dangers. Your Eminence is too able a statesman not to be aware that at the present moment the King has not a hundred and fifty thousand livres in his coffers."

"That is not my affair," said Mazarin, triumphantly, "that concerns M. Fouquet, the superintendent, whose accounts I have instructed you to audit for several months past."

Colbert pursed up his lips at the name of Fouquet.

"His Majesty," said he, between his teeth, "has no money, except what M. Fouquet collects. Your money, monseigneur, would be a dainty morsel for him."

"Well, I am not the superintendent of the King's finances; I have my own finances to look after. Assuredly, I would do much to gratify his Majesty; as for a legacy, I have no objection — but I cannot rob my family."

"Such a legacy would dishonor you and offend the King. A partial bequest to his Majesty would be a sort of confession that the portion bequeathed was not acquired honestly."

"M. Colbert!"

"I believe your Eminence was doing me the honor of asking my advice."

"Yes, but you are ignorant of the principal details of the matter in question."

"I am ignorant of nothing, monseigneur. For the last ten years I have been engaged in verifying every column of figures that has been set down in France, and, although it has cost me much toil to nail them inside my head, they are so well riveted there now that I could repeat, to the smallest item, the amount of every sum expended from Cherbourg to Marseilles, including the moderate outlay of M. Letellier, who is thrifty, and the little secret gratuities of M. Fouquet, who is thriftless."

"So you would have me fling all my money into the coffers of the King!" cried Mazarin, ironically, notwithstanding the sighs and groans his gout drew from him. "I don't suppose that, if I did, the King would blame me very bitterly, but while squandering my millions, he would be perfectly justified in laughing at me, and I know he would do so, too."

"Your Eminence has misunderstood me. I have not the slightest intention of advising you to let the King spend your money."

"You said so plainly enough, I fancy, when you advised me to give it to him."

"Ah!" replied Colbert, "your Eminence has been naturally so engrossed by your sufferings that you have entirely lost sight of the King's peculiar turn of mind."

"What do you mean?"

"He has a strong bias to a failing which, as your Eminence just now confessed to the Theatine, is also yours."

"Don't be afraid to name it; it is —"

"It is pride. Excuse me, monseigneur; I should, perhaps, have said the consciousness of superiority. Kings have no pride; for that is a human passion."

"Pride — yes, you are right. Go on."

"Well, then, unless I am greatly deceived in my anticipations, the best thing your Eminence can do is to give all your money to the King, and that immediately."

"But why?" asked Mazarin, completely puzzled.

"Because the King will not accept all your money."

"Indeed! a young man who has no money and is devoured by ambition?"

"Granted."

"A young man who longs for my death?"

"Monseigneur —"

"Because he wants to be my heir, Colbert; yes, he longs for my death for that reason, idiot that I am not to have foreseen that."

"That may be. But if the donation is made in a certain manner, he will refuse it."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"But I am sure of it. A young man who has as yet done nothing, who hungers for fame, who is wild to reign alone, will never take any house ready to his hand: he will build for himself. This prince, monseigneur, will not be satisfied

with the Palais-Royal, which Richelieu bequeathed to him, nor with the Palais-Mazarin, which you have constructed with such magnificence, nor with the Louvre, in which dwelt his ancestors, nor with Saint-Germain, in which he was born. He will scorn everything of which he is not himself the originator. That is my prediction."

"And you are willing to guarantee that, if I give my millions to the King — "

"He will refuse them, provided the gift be accompanied by certain words."

"And what are these words ? "

"I will write them down, monseigneur, if you will be pleased to dictate them."

"But what advantage is to come to me from all this ? "

"An enormous one. No one can henceforth charge you with that unseemly avarice with which the pamphleteers have upbraided the most brilliant intellect of the century."

"You are right, Colbert, you are right. Go and find the King, on my part, and carry him my will."

"Your donation, monseigneur."

"But if he accept! If he accept! "

"There would still be thirteen million left for your family, a pretty neat sum."

"But if he accept, you would be either a fool or a traitor."

"And I am neither, monseigneur. You seem to fear very much that the King may accept. You have a good deal more reason to fear that he may not accept — "

"If he does not accept, I will, be assured, make over to him the thirteen millions I have kept in reserve — yes, I will do so — yes, yes — but those pangs are returning; I feel as if I were going to faint — ah! Colbert, I am very sick, I am not long for this world."

Colbert was startled.

The cardinal was, indeed, very ill. The perspiration streamed down from his forehead upon his bed of pain, and the awful pallor of that face, bathed in moisture, was a spectacle that might have moved the compassion of the most hardened practitioner. Colbert must have been very much affected, for he quitted the bed-chamber, summoning Bernouin to attend to the dying man, and passed into the corridor.

When there, he strode up and down, an expression of rapt meditation on his vulgar face that almost ennobled it; with rounded

shoulders, neck bent forward, and half-open lips from which escaped fragments of his incoherent thoughts, he was mustering up courage for the bold venture he desired to undertake — and, ten yards away from him, separated only by a wall, his master was expiring in agonies, agonies that forced from him heart-rending shrieks, oblivious now of the treasures of earth and the joys of heaven, his mind wholly engrossed by the terrors of hell.

While Guénaud, who had been sent for again, was devoting all his energies to the task of relieving the cardinal, with the aid of hot napkins and the application of local and counteractive remedies, Colbert, his big head clasped in both his hands, as if he could thus condense the projects that germinated in his brain, revolved in his mind the terms in which the donation he was about to compel Mazarin to write — as soon as he had a respite from his tortures — should be conceived. It would seem as if the cardinal's shrieks and the very assaults of death upon this representative of the past were but stimulants for the genius of this thinker with the bushy eyebrows who had his face already set toward the rising of the new sun of a regenerated society.

When Mazarin had been restored to consciousness, Colbert returned to his bedside, and persuaded him to dictate the donation in the following words:

"About to appear before my God, who is the Master of mankind, I beseech my King, who is my master on earth, to resume possession of the wealth his bounty has bestowed upon me, wealth my family will be glad to see pass into such illustrious hands. A detailed list of my possessions has been drawn up, and will be at the disposal of his Majesty whenever he requires it, or whenever his most devoted servant is numbered with the dead.

"Jules, Cardinal de Mazarin."

The cardinal affixed his signature with a sigh; Colbert sealed the packet and bore it immediately to the Louvre, whither the King had just returned.

Then he went back to his own home, rubbing his hands with the satisfaction of a workman who has done a good day's work.

CHAPTER XLVII.

HOW ANNE OF AUSTRIA ADVISED LOUIS XIV. ONE WAY, AND HOW M. FOUQUET ADVISED HIM ANOTHER.

The tidings of the cardinal's hopeless condition had already spread, and brought at least as many to the Louvre as did the news of Monsieur's marriage, which had been announced officially a short time before. The King, his mind still full of what he had seen and heard at the evening party, had hardly entered his apartments when an usher announced that the same crowd of courtiers who had been so eager to attend his levee in the morning were now anxious to wait upon him while he was getting ready to retire; this homage had been offered by the courtiers during the reign of the cardinal to the prime minister oftener than to the King, Mazarin apparently being careless about incurring his sovereign's jealousy.

But the minister, as we have already stated, was afflicted with a dangerous fit of gout, and the tide of flattery now mounted toward the throne.

Courtiers have a marvellous instinct for scenting out beforehand what is going to happen; courtiers possess the essence of all science; they are diplomatists, skilled in unravelling the threads of entangled circumstances; captains, able to divine the issue of battles; doctors, proficient in the cure of diseases.

Louis XIV. was well aware of these facts, having been taught them by his mother, together with a good deal of other useful knowledge. He was, therefore, convinced that his Eminence Monseigneur le Cardinal de Mazarin must be very ill.

So soon as Anne of Austria had led the young queen into her apartments and relieved her from the weight of the ceremonial coiffure, she returned to her son, who was in his study, where alone, sullen, and disheartened, he was wrestling with one of those dull, terrible whirlwinds of anger, one of those royal rages which sometimes swept over his soul, and which, if they exploded, would be fruitful in catastrophes. But thanks to his marvellous self-control, in Louis XIV. these tempests changed externally into gentle breezes. The only furious outburst in the presence of others that history records of him is that famous paroxysm of wrath — described with such amazement by Saint-Simon — which was brought on fifty years

later by the dishonesty of the Duc du Maine, and which found relief in a shower of blows inflicted by the royal cane on the back of a poor servant who had stolen a biscuit.

The youthful monarch was then, as we have said, a prey to the fiercest excitement, and while looking in a mirror he muttered:

"King! — yes, King in name, but not in fact, — thou art but a vain phantom, a lifeless statue without other power than to force a salutation from a courtier! When wilt thou raise thy effeminate arms and clinch thy nerveless hands? When wilt thou open for other purpose than to sigh, or smile, those lips condemned to the stupid insensibility of the marbles of thy gallery?"

Then, passing his hand across his forehead, he went to the window, as if he wanted air. There he saw beneath him a few horsemen talking together and a few knots of idlers, timidly inquisitive. The horsemen belonged to the watch, the group of idlers consisted of those curious people for whom a king is always a queer object, as is a rhinoceros, a crocodile, or a serpent.

He struck his temples with his open hand.

"King of France!" he exclaimed, "what a title! People of France! what a multitude of human beings! And lo! I return to my Louvre; my horses, but just unharnessed, are still smoking, and all the interest I arouse is limited to a score of persons who barely look at me as I pass. A score — what am I saying? no, there are not twenty persons who are eager to have a look at their King, and I have not even ten archers to guard my house: archers, people, guards, are all at the Palais-Royal. God in Heaven! why should not I, the King, have the right to ask of thee at least this?"

"Because," said a voice in response to his, a voice that spoke outside the hangings of the King's study, "because in the Palais-Royal is gold, and gold is an indispensable force for him who would reign."

Louis turned round abruptly; the voice that had come to his ears was the voice of Anne of Austria. The King started, and, advancing toward his mother:

"I hope," said he, "that your Majesty has not been paying any attention to the empty declamation with which solitude and squeamishness — those familiars of kings — sometimes affect the most cheerful natures."

"I have paid attention but to one thing, my son, to the fact that you were complaining."

"I? By no means; I assure you, Madame, you were mistaken."

"Then, Sire, what were you doing?"

"Oh, it came into my head that I was still under my tutor's rod, and was expanding the subject matter of a theme which he had ordered me to develop."

"My son," answered Anne of Austria, "you do wrong not to trust me; you do wrong not to give me your confidence. A day will come, come, perhaps, soon, when you may need to recall this axiom: gold is irresistible power, and they only are kings who are irresistibly powerful."

"Your purpose, however," pursued the King, "was not to run down the rich of the present generation, was it?"

"No," returned Anne of Austria, quickly, "no, Sire; those who are rich in the present generation are rich because you have willed that they should be so under your reign. They have doubtless been such faithful servants of your Majesty that you thought it right to allow them to enrich themselves. That is what those words of mine for which you seem to blame me signify."

"God forbid, Madame, that I should blame my mother for anything whatever!"

"Besides," continued Anne of Austria, "the Lord grants the goods of this world but for a time, and to counterbalance honors and wealth he has sent suffering, disease, and death. I do not know of any persons," she added with a painful smile that showed she made a personal application of her melancholy reflection, "who expect to carry with them their wealth or their grandeur to the grave. The consequence is that the young reap the fruits of the abundant harvest for which the old have prepared the ground."

Louis paid the closest attention to his mother's words, words she had uttered with the evident purpose of consoling him.

"Madame," said the King, looking at her fixedly, "it strikes me that you have something further to communicate to me."

"Nothing, my son, absolutely nothing. But you must have noticed that M. le Cardinal was very ill to-night?"

Louis observed his mother closely, trying to detect some emotion in her voice, some expression of grief on her features.

The countenance of Anne of Austria was indeed slightly altered, but her sufferings arose from a cause that concerned only herself. Perhaps the alteration was caused by the cancer which was already beginning to eat into her breast.

"Yes, Madame," said the King, "M. de Mazarin is very ill."

"If his Eminence were summoned away by God, the kingdom would sustain a great loss. Is not that your opinion as well as mine, my son?" inquired Anne of Austria.

"Yes, undoubtedly, Madame," answered Louis, coloring, "his death would be a great loss to the kingdom; but I am inclined to believe that the cardinal is not in such danger, he is still young."

Just when the King had finished speaking an usher raised the hangings and stood, with a paper in his hand, waiting for the King to question him.

"What is it?" asked the King.

"A message from M. de Mazarin," answered the usher.

"Give it to me," said Louis.

And he took the paper. But as he was about to open it, he heard a great noise in the gallery, the antechamber, and even in the courtyard.

"Ha!" muttered the King, who doubtless guessed at the cause of this triple noise. "Why did I say just now that there was but one king in France? I was in error, there are two."

At this moment the door opened, and Fouquet, the superintendent of finances, stood before the King. He it was who had caused the noise in the gallery; he it was whose lackeys had caused the noise in the antechambers; he it was whose horses had caused the noise in the courtyard. In addition to this, a loud murmur was heard along his way, which did not die away until some time after his entrance; just the kind of murmur with which Louis XIV. would like to have been greeted, the kind of murmur he would like to hear dying away behind him.

"Not exactly a king, as you suppose," whispered Anne of Austria to her son, "but a man who is far too rich, that is all."

The words were spoken in a tone that denoted a malevolent intention in the speaker; but Louis, on the contrary, was calm and self-possessed, and not the slightest wrinkle marred the smoothness of his brow.

He nodded familiarly to Fouquet, while he continued to

unfold the document which had just been handed to him by the usher. Fouquet noticed how he was engaged, and, with unembarrassed and respectful courtesy, he approached Anne of Austria, so that the King might be at perfect liberty.

But though Louis opened the paper, he did not read it.

He was listening to the exquisitely worded compliments the superintendent paid his mother on the beauty of her hands and arms.

The cloud that had been on Anne of Austria's face disappeared; she almost smiled.

Fouquet perceived that the King, instead of reading, was looking at him and giving an ear to what he was saying. He turned half round, and, though still apparently devoting all his attention to the queen-mother, he faced the King.

"You are aware, M. Fouquet," said Louis, "that M. de Mazarin is very ill?"

"Yes, Sire," answered Fouquet, "I am; I know that he is very ill indeed. I was informed of the news at my country house in Vaux, and I considered it so important that I left immediately."

"Left Vaux this evening, monsieur?"

"Just an hour and a half ago, your Majesty," said Fouquet, consulting a watch that was studded with diamonds.

"An hour and a half ago!" exclaimed the King, able to master his anger, but not his astonishment.

"I see your Majesty doubts my word, and it is very natural, for the rapid pace at which I have travelled is a surprise even to myself. However, I received some time ago from England three pairs of horses which, I was assured, were wonderfully fast. They were placed at distances of twelve miles apart; I tried them to-night, and they made the journey from Vaux to the Louvre in an hour and a half; so your Majesty sees I have not been cheated."

The queen-mother smiled with secret envy.

Fouquet surmised the thought that was behind the smile.

"Madame," he added hastily, "such horses are intended, not for subjects, but for kings, for whatever is of transcendent worth naturally belongs to kings —"

The King raised his head.

"Still," interrupted Anne of Austria, "so far as I am aware, you are not a king, M. Fouquet."

"And therefore, Madame, these horses only await his

Majesty's permission to enter the stables of the Louvre; and if I took the liberty of trying them, it was solely because I feared to offer anything to the King which was not a marvel."

The King turned very red.

"You know, M. Fouquet," said the queen, "that it is not the custom at the court of France for a subject to offer anything to his King?"

Fouquet started.

"I hoped, Madame," he replied nervously, "that my love for his Majesty, my incessant desire to please him, might serve as an excuse for such a slight breach of etiquette. Besides, it is not a present that I venture to offer, it is a tribute which I pay."

"Thanks, M. Fouquet," said the King, politely. "I am grateful for the motive that prompted your offer, for I am fond of fine horses. But you are aware that I am not at all rich; indeed, you ought to be better aware of the fact than anybody else, since you are my superintendent of finances. I cannot, then, afford to purchase such a valuable set of horses, however much I might desire to do so."

Fouquet flashed a haughty glance at the queen-mother, who seemed to triumph in the minister's discomfiture, and answered:

"Sire, luxury is the virtue of kings; luxury assimilates them to God himself; it is luxury that places them above humanity. The luxury of a king redounds to the prosperity and honor of his subjects. From the gentle warmth of the luxury of kings is generated the luxury of individuals, and from the luxury of individuals spring the riches of a people. Had his Majesty accepted the gift of these six incomparable steeds, he would have stimulated the rivalry of all the horse-breeders in the country, of all in Limousin, Perche, and Normandy; such emulation would have profited every one. But the King is silent, and therefore I am condemned."

During this address Louis, to conceal his thoughts, did nothing but fold and unfold the paper of Mazarin, upon which, however, he had not yet cast his eyes. At last they rested on it, and as soon as he had read the first line, he uttered an exclamation.

"What is the matter, my son?" asked Anne of Austria, hurrying to his side.

"From the cardinal!" he cried, continuing to read. "Yes, it is really from him!"

"Is he worse?"

"Read," said the King, handing the parchment to his mother, as if he felt assured that nothing less than the perusal of this astounding document could convince Anne of Austria of its authenticity.

The queen-mother read it, and as she read her eyes sparkled with a joy which her vain efforts to conceal only rendered the more evident and which attracted the attention of Fouquet.

"Oh! a donation in due form," said she.

"A donation?" repeated Fouquet.

"Yes," replied the King, his reply being particularly directed to the superintendent of finances; "yes, M. le Cardinal has, at the point of death, made me a donation of all his property."

"Forty millions!" cried the queen. "Ah! my son, what a noble act is this of the cardinal! It will show how baseless are all the malignant rumors that have been spread concerning him. Forty millions amassed by the slow toil of years and the whole amount to be gathered now into the royal treasury! He is a faithful subject and a true Christian."

And after again running her eyes over the deed, she handed it back to Louis XIV., whom the mention of such an enormous sum had thrown into a state of agitation.

Fouquet, who had retreated a few steps backward, was silent. The King looked at him and tendered him the document.

The superintendent glanced over it haughtily for a second or so.

Then, with a bow, he said:

"Yes, Sire, I see that it is a donation."

"You must answer it, my son," cried Anne of Austria, "you must answer it immediately."

"But how, Madame?"

"By a visit to the cardinal."

"Why, it is hardly an hour since I left him," said the King.

"Then write, Sire."

"Oh, what need of writing?" answered the young King, discontentedly.

"Well, my son," said Anne of Austria, "I think the man who makes such a present as that has some right to expect a prompt acknowledgment of his generosity, at the very least."

Then, turning to the superintendent:

"Is not that your opinion, M. Fouquet?"

"You ask me if the present is worth the trouble, Madame? Yes, undoubtedly," answered the superintendent, with an air of loftiness that did not escape the King.

"Accept it, then, and thank him," insisted Anne of Austria.

"What does M. Fouquet say?" asked Louis XIV.

"Your Majesty wishes to know my opinion?"

"Yes."

"Then thank him, Sire —"

"Ah!" exclaimed Anne of Austria.

"But do not accept," continued Fouquet.

"And why?" inquired the queen.

"Why, you have answered the question yourself, Madame," replied Fouquet; "because kings must not and cannot receive presents from their subjects."

The King kept silent between these two contrary opinions.

"But forty millions!" exclaimed Anne of Austria, in the same tone in which Marie Antoinette cried, "I could never have believed it!"

"I know," answered Fouquet, laughing, "that forty millions make quite a pretty sum, a sum that might tempt even a royal conscience."

"But, monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "instead of dissuading the King from receiving this present, it is your duty, especially considering the office you hold, to tell his Majesty that these forty millions constitute a fortune for him."

"Madame, it is exactly because these forty millions would be a fortune for the King that I will say to him: 'Sire, if it be unbecoming in a King to accept from a subject six horses worth twenty thousand livres, it must be far more dishonorable to owe a fortune to another subject who was more or less unscrupulous in his choice of the materials which contributed to the building up of that fortune.'"

"It is not your place, monsieur, to give a lesson to your King," said Anne of Austria, "you would do better to procure him the forty millions you are now making him lose."

"The King can have them when he wishes," answered the superintendent, with a bow.

"Aye, by oppressing the King's subjects," retorted the queen-mother.

"And have not the people been oppressed, Madame," replied Fouquet, "when they were forced to coin their sweat into the

forty millions donated in that deed? For that matter, I have given my opinion because his Majesty demanded it; let him demand my assent, and he shall have it also."

"Come, come, my son, accept," said Anne of Austria, "you stand too high for criticism or calumny to reach you."

"Refuse, Sire," said Fouquet. "While a king lives his conscience is his standard, his will is his judge; but when dead, he will be on trial before posterity, which will either applaud or condemn him."

"Thanks, mother," answered Louis, with a respectful inclination to the queen. "Thanks, M. Fouquet," said he, courteously dismissing the superintendent.

"Do you accept?" asked Anne of Austria, once more.

"I will consider it," he replied, looking at Fouquet.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AT DEATH'S DOOR.

On the day the donation was brought to the King the cardinal was transported to Vincennes. The King and his court followed him. The light of the torch that was about to disappear was still sufficiently dazzling to absorb in its radiance all other rays. Moreover, as we have already seen, Louis XIV. was ever the faithful satellite of his minister and up to the last moment obeyed the force of gravitation that drew him toward him. As Guénard had foretold, the disease had grown worse; it was now not merely an attack of gout, it was an attack of death. There was one thing, however, that increased tenfold the agonies of the dying man: his anxiety about the donation he had sent to the King was an ineffable torture to him; that donation which Colbert had assured him should certainly be returned. The cardinal, as has been stated, had the greatest confidence in the predictions of his secretary. But the sum was a large one, and, whatever might be the foresight of Colbert, the minister now and then thought that both he and the Theatine might be mistaken, and that the chances of his damnation and of Louis sending him back his millions were equally problematical.

Besides, the longer those millions were kept away from him,

the more clearly did Mazarin see that it was well worth while risking something for them, and, above all, risking the loss of so dubious an entity as a soul.

Mazarin, though a cardinal and a prime minister, was almost an atheist and entirely a materialist. Every time the door opened, he turned quickly toward it, hoping to witness the entrance of that luckless donation; then he lay back in despair, and the physical pangs he had for a moment forgotten became keener than ever.

Anne of Austria, too, had followed the cardinal; though age had rendered her heart selfish, she could not help exhibiting a certain degree of sorrow at the spectacle of the life that was ebbing away — sorrow that she owed Mazarin as his wife, said some, as his sovereign, said others. Her face might be described as a face that had put on mourning, and all the court imitated her.

Louis, not wishing that the feelings which were working in his soul should be detected on his features, persisted in keeping his room, with his nurse for his sole companion. The nearer to him approached the time when all constraint would be unnecessary, the more humble and patient he became, concentrating his energies, as do all strong minds which hold themselves in check, to have the more elasticity when the decisive moment arrives.

Extreme unction had been administered to the cardinal, but secretly. Faithful to his habits of dissimulation, he struggled against appearances, even against reality, and received visitors at his bedside with the air of one who regarded his complaint as a mere passing indisposition.

Guénaud, on his side, observed the most absolute secrecy; worried and tired out with questions and importunities, his answer was always the same: "His Eminence has youth and vigor on his side; but the will of God is omnipotent, and if He doom a man to death, why, that man is doomed."

These words, which he uttered with a certain amount of caution and discretion, and only to a few, were commented on with great interest by two persons: the King and the cardinal.

In spite of the prediction of Guénaud, Mazarin cheated himself with hopes of recovery, or perhaps he played his part so dexterously that even the craftiest, in thinking that he cheated himself, were themselves his dupes.

Louis, who had not visited the cardinal for two days; Louis, who had his eyes riveted on that donation which wholly absorbed the mind of his prime minister; Louis had no clue to that prime minister's thoughts. The son of Louis XIII., following the example of his father, had hitherto been so little of a king that, while ardently longing for kingly power, there was mingled with longing the terror that is always the companion of the unknown. So having come to a decision, which he was careful to impart to no one, he resolved to have an interview with Mazarin. It was to Anne of Austria, who attended the cardinal assiduously, that he communicated his wishes; she conveyed them to the cardinal, who was much startled by the intelligence.

What was the King's object in asking for this interview? Was it to give him back his millions, as Colbert had said he was sure to do? Was it to thank him and keep them, as Mazarin believed in his heart would be the case? Still, as the dying man knew that this uncertainty was adding to his sufferings, he did not hesitate for a moment.

"His Majesty is welcome, oh, very welcome, indeed!" he cried, making a sign to Colbert, who was seated at the foot of the bed, and who understood the sign perfectly. "Madame," he continued, "will you be kind enough to assure the King personally of the truth of what I have just said?"

Anne of Austria rose; she, too, was in a hurry to have a positive answer as to the destiny of those forty millions, now the subject of the secret curiosity of every one.

When she had passed out, Mazarin, with a mighty effort, raised himself and turned to Colbert.

"Well, Colbert," said he, "two woeful days, two harrowing days, and, as you see, no prospect of what you were so certain of."

"Patience, monseigneur," said Colbert.

"Are you mad, wretched man that you are? You talk of patience! Oh, Colbert! Colbert! you must be mocking me! I am dying, and you tell me to wait!"

"Monseigneur," answered Colbert, with his customary coolness, "matters will turn out exactly as I have stated. His Majesty is about to visit you, and he does so for the purpose of restoring you your donation."

"That is your opinion? Well, mine is that he is visiting me for the purpose of thanking me."

At this moment Anne of Austria entered; on her way to her son's apartments she had met a new empiric in one of the antechambers. He claimed to have a powder that would save the cardinal. She brought with her a sample of the powder.

However, it was not for this that Mazarin was waiting; he refused to look at it even, declaring that life was not worth all the trouble people took to preserve it. But, while propounding this philosophic maxim, the secret he had so long kept within his breast escaped him.

"That, Madame," said he, "is not the point in which I am most interested. But just two days ago I made a trifling donation to the King; his Majesty has never since spoken of it, no doubt from delicacy. But the time has come for some sort of an explanation, and I must beg your Majesty to tell me what are the King's ideas on the subject."

Anne of Austria opened her lips to answer. Mazarin stopped her.

"The truth, Madame," said he, "the truth, in Heaven's name! Do not flatter a dying man with hopes that may prove vain."

Then he noticed a look on Colbert's face which plainly implied that he had taken a wrong step.

"I know," said Anne of Austria, taking the cardinal's hand, "I know how generously you have acted. It was no trifling donation, as you so modestly term it, but a magnificent gift. I am aware how painful it would be to you if the King — "

Half a score of men together could not have listened for her reply with the intensity displayed by the dying statesman.

"If the King — " he repeated.

"If the King," continued the queen, "did not gratefully accept the boon you have so nobly offered him."

Mazarin fell back helplessly on his pillow like Pantaloon; that is to say, with all the despair of a man who has given up everything for lost. But he had sufficient strength and presence of mind left to hurl at Colbert one of those looks that mean more than ten sonnets — ten long poems.

"Would you not have considered a refusal on the King's part as an insult?" asked the queen.

Mazarin, for answer, rolled his head backward and forward on the pillow. The queen was deceived, or feigned to be deceived, by this demonstration.

"And so," said she, "I have got the better of his reluctance by means of the powerful arguments I urged in favor of his acceptance. Certain persons, jealous, doubtless, of the glory your generosity is sure to win for you, tried to dissuade the King from receiving your donation; but I did my very best to serve you, and I believe I have succeeded in shielding you from the mortification you must have experienced if they had prevailed."

"Ah!" murmured Mazarin, with lack-lustre eyes; "ah! you have, indeed, rendered me a service, a service I shall never forget during the few hours that may still be left to me!"

"A service, too, which I must confess I have not been able to render your Eminence without considerable difficulty," continued Anne of Austria.

"Oh! I can well believe you — Ah! ah! ah!"

"Good Heavens! what is the matter?"

"Ah! I am on fire!"

"Do you suffer so badly, then?"

"Like one of the damned!"

Colbert hoped the floor would open and swallow him.

"And so your Majesty thinks," resumed Mazarin, "that the King" — he paused a few seconds — "that the King is coming here to tell me that he is, really, rather obliged to me?"

"I believe so," said the queen.

The look that Mazarin flashed at Colbert was enough to annihilate him.

At this moment the ushers announced that the King was passing through the crowded antechambers. The announcement produced such an uproar that Colbert was enabled to escape through the little side-door at the back of the bed. Anne of Austria rose, and waited for her son, standing. Louis XIV. appeared at the threshold and fixed his eyes on the dying minister, who did not go to the trouble of making the slightest acknowledgment of his Majesty's presence, believing that he had now nothing more to expect from him.

An usher moved an armchair close to the bed. Louis, after saluting his mother and the cardinal, sat down. The queen then sat down also.

The King glanced over his shoulder, and the usher, comprehending the meaning of that glance, made a sign to the courtiers at the door, who immediately withdrew. The velvet hangings fell, and with them silence fell upon the chamber.

The young sovereign, always very timid in presence of the man who had been his master since his birth, now that that master was encircled by the supreme majesty of death, respected him more than ever. He did not venture to begin the conversation, feeling that every word uttered must have an important bearing on the concerns both of this world and of the next.

As for the cardinal, he had no thought for anything except his donation. It was not the pangs of disease that gave him that dejected air, that heartbroken look, it was the expectation of the thanks that were about to issue from the King's lips and deprive him forever of all hope of restitution.

The first to break the silence was Mazarin.

"Does your Majesty," he asked, "intend to remain long at Vincennes?"

Louis nodded an affirmative.

"This gracious favor, granted by your Majesty to a dying man," continued Mazarin, "will mitigate the anguish of death."

"I hope," answered the King, "that the man I am visiting is not dying, but likely to be restored soon to health."

Mazarin made a motion with his head which clearly signified: "Your Majesty is very kind, but I happen to know more about the matter than you do."

"Ah! Sire," he said aloud, "it is your last visit, your last visit, Sire."

"If that were the case, M. le Cardinal," replied Louis, "I would come a last time to seek the advice of a guide to whom I owe everything."

Anne of Austria was a woman; she could not keep back the tears. Louis also was very much moved; Mazarin was still more so, but for very different reasons. There was renewed silence, the queen brushed away the tears from her cheeks, and Louis recovered his firmness.

"I was saying," resumed the King, "that I owe a great deal to your Eminence."

The cardinal's eyes were riveted on the King; he felt the momentous, the critical moment was at hand.

"And," the King went on, "the principal object of my visit was to thank you sincerely for the last evidence of your friendship you were good enough to send me."

The cardinal's cheeks fell in, his lips partially opened, and a

sigh, the most dismal he had ever heaved, was about to escape from his breast.

"Sire," said he, "though I have despoiled my poor family, though I have ruined all belonging to me, — in which, no doubt, many will think me to have acted unjustly, — it can, at least, never be said that I hesitated to make any sacrifice for my King."

Anne of Austria's tears flowed anew.

"My dear cardinal," answered Louis, in a tone of greater gravity than might have been expected from his years, "you evidently misunderstand me."

Mazarin raised himself upon his elbow.

"No one here is thinking of despoiling your dear family, or ruining those dependent on you. Oh, no, that shall never be!"

"Oh, I see!" thought Mazarin, "he will restore me some scrap or other of it. Well, the best thing for me to do is to get as large a piece of it as I can."

"The King is going to be foolishly affected and play the part of a generous monarch," thought the queen. "I must not allow him to impoverish himself; he may never have such another opportunity of becoming rich."

"Sire," said the cardinal aloud, "my family is very numerous, and my nieces will have to endure many privations when I am gone."

"Oh," hastily interrupted the queen, "do not be in the slightest anxiety in respect to your family, my dear M. Mazarin; no friends shall be dearer to us than yours; your nieces shall be looked upon as my own children, the sisters of his Majesty, and whatever favors are distributed in France shall be for those you love."

"All smoke!" thought Mazarin, who knew better than any one the reliance that is to be placed on the promises of kings.

Louis read the dying man's thoughts on his face.

"Do not be uneasy, my dear M. de Mazarin," said he, with an irony that veiled a rather sad smile; "the Demoiselles de Mancini will lose, in losing you, their most precious possession; but they will still continue to be the richest heiresses in France. And as you have been pleased to give me their dowry —"

The cardinal was gasping.

"I return it," Louis went on, taking from his breast and

holding out to Mazarin the parchment containing the donation — that donation which for two days had kept the mind of Mazarin in such frightful agitation.

"What did I tell you, monseigneur?" came in a whisper so faint that it was scarcely more than a breathing from behind the curtains.

"Your Majesty returns me my donation!" cried Mazarin, so bewildered with joy that he forgot he had been enacting the part of a benefactor.

"Your Majesty returns him the forty millions!" cried Anne of Austria, so astounded that she forgot she had been enacting the part of a broken-hearted widow.

"Yes, M. le Cardinal; yes, Madame," answered Louis XIV., tearing in pieces the document which Mazarin had not yet ventured to stretch out his hand for. "Yes, I destroy the deed which robbed a whole family. The property acquired by his Eminence in my service is his own property and not mine."

"But is your Majesty aware," cried Anne of Austria, "that you have not ten thousand crowns in your coffers?"

"Madame, I have just performed my first royal action, and I hope it will worthily inaugurate my reign."

"You are right, Sire!" exclaimed Mazarin; "what you have just done is truly great, is truly generous."

And he looked intently at the fragments of the deed, examining every one of them, to make sure that it was the original that had been torn up and not a copy.

At length his eyes lighted on the one containing the signature; there could be no doubt about its genuineness; he fell back on his bolster in an ecstasy.

Anne of Austria could not hide her despair; she raised her hands appealingly to heaven.

"Ah! Sire," exclaimed Mazarin, "ah! Sire, all my family will bless, will love you! *Per Baccho!* should one of my kindred ever cause you the slightest annoyance, you have but to knit your brows, and I will rise from my grave."

This little piece of acting did not produce the effect intended by its author. Louis had his mind engaged on considerations of a higher order; as for Anne of Austria, feeling that she could not endure the magnanimity of her son and the hypocrisy of the cardinal without the wrath that was boiling within her exploding, she rose and passed out of the room, careless about thus displaying the extent of her disappointment.

Mazarin saw the situation clearly, and, being afraid that Louis XIV. might change his mind, he began, in order to divert his attention, to cry out, as Scapin was to cry out later on in that glorious bit of comedy which the surly and jaundiced Boileau condemned as unworthy of Molière.

His cries, however, gradually became fainter, and when Anne of Austria left the apartment, they died away altogether.

"M. le Cardinal," asked the King, "have you any advice to give me?"

"Sire," answered Mazarin, "you are already prudence and wisdom personified. As for your generosity, I need not speak of it; you have just done an act that surpasses all the acts of the noblest men in ancient or modern times."

The King was not at all affected by this eulogium.

"So you refuse to cross the line of your gratitude, monsieur, and your experience, far more widely famed than my wisdom and generosity, does not supply you with any friendly counsel for the guidance of my future life?"

Mazarin reflected a moment.

"You have just done much for me, or, rather, for mine, Sire," said he.

"We shall not refer further to that, if you please," answered the King.

"Well, I should like to make you some return," continued Mazarin, "for the forty millions you have abandoned in such royal fashion."

Louis XIV. made a gesture that indicated plainly how painful were all these flatteries to him.

"I will," said Mazarin, "give you one piece of advice; advice far more precious than these forty millions —"

"M. le Cardinal!" interrupted Louis XIV.

"Sire, listen to this advice."

"I am listening."

"Come close to me, for I am growing weaker, — closer, Sire, closer."

The King bent down over the dying man.

"Sire," said Mazarin, but in a voice so faint that his words came to the King's attentive ears almost as a far-away warning from the tomb, "Sire, never take a prime minister."

Louis drew back in amazement. The advice was in itself a confession. But this candid confession of Mazarin was, indeed, a treasure. The cardinal's legacy to the young monarch

was composed of only six words; but they were, as Mazarin stated, words well worth forty millions.

Louis was for the moment almost stunned. To judge from Mazarin's appearance, he believed he had made a very natural remark.

"And now, is there any one, outside of your own family," asked the young King, "whom you might like to recommend to me, M. de Mazarin?"

There was a slight rustling of the curtains at the other side of the bed. Mazarin understood.

"Yes, yes!" he cried quickly, "I have a man to recommend to your notice who is honest, sagacious, and in every way qualified for your service."

"His name, M. le Cardinal?"

"His name is yet almost unknown, Sire; he is M. Colbert, my intendant. Oh, try him," added Mazarin, forcibly; "all that he has predicted has come to pass; he is keen-eyed and is never at fault either as to things, or — which is far more unusual — as to men. Sire, I am deeply in your debt, but I believe that by giving you M. Colbert I discharge the obligation."

"Just as you like," answered Louis XIV., rather indifferently; for, as Mazarin said, the name of Colbert was quite unknown to him, and he fancied the enthusiasm of the cardinal in his regard might be but the hallucination of a dying man.

The cardinal had again fallen back on his pillow.

"For the present, adieu, Sire, adieu," murmured Mazarin; "I am very weary, and I have still a rough road to travel before presenting myself to my new Master. Adieu, Sire."

The young King's eyes filled with tears. He leaned over the dying statesman — almost half dead already — and then hurried out of the apartment.

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

PART II.

CHAPTER XLIX.

COLBERT'S FIRST APPEARANCE.

Both the dying man and the King spent a night of torture: the one longing for a release from his agony; the other for the beginning of his freedom.

Louis did not go to bed. An hour after leaving the cardinal's room he was informed that his minister, having regained a little strength, had insisted on being dressed and rouged, so that he might receive a visit from the ambassadors. Like Augustus, he no doubt considered the world as a vast stage, and was determined to play the last act of the comedy befittingly.

Anne of Austria did not enter the apartment again; she had really nothing more to do there now. Propriety served as an excuse for her absence. Indeed, the cardinal never even asked about her; the advice the queen had given her son still rankled in his heart.

Toward midnight, Mazarin, with painted face, entered on the last agonies. He had revised his will, and as this will was the exact expression of a resolute purpose, he feared lest some one, interested in its provisions, might take advantage of his weakness to make him change them. He had, therefore, given the watchword to Colbert, who was mounting guard in the corridor leading to the cardinal's bedroom, like the most vigilant of sentinels.

The King, who never left his own apartment, sent his nurse out every hour, bidding her to return with a correct bulletin of the state of the cardinal's health.

After learning that Mazarin had been dressed and painted, and had received the ambassadors, Louis was informed that the prayers for those in the last agony were being said for the cardinal.

At one in the morning Guénaud had administered the last, or, as it was called, "heroic" remedy. One of the old customs of that duelling age, which was about to disappear in favor of a far different era, was to believe that there were certain secret, doughty thrusts against which death stood no chance.

Mazarin, after taking the remedy, breathed freely for nearly ten minutes. He at once gave orders that the news of a change for the better should be spread everywhere. When the King heard this he felt as if a cold sweat were passing over his forehead: he had just had a glimpse of freedom; slavery seemed darker and more unpleasant than it had been before. But the next bulletin changed matters entirely. Mazarin could no longer breathe, and could hardly follow the prayers recited at his bedside by the curé of Saint-Nicolas des Champs. Thereupon the King walked in a state of great excitement up and down his chamber, glancing, while he did so, at several papers drawn from a casket, of which he alone had the key. The nurse returned for the third time. M. de Mazarin had just uttered a witticism, and had ordered his "Flora," by Titian, to be revarnished.

At length, toward two in the morning, the King had to succumb to his weariness, for he had not slept for twenty-four hours. Sleep, so powerful at his age, overcame him. He slept for about an hour. But he did not go to bed during that hour; he slept in an armchair. At about four o'clock the nurse returned and awoke him.

"Well?" inquired the King.

"Well, my dear Sire," answered the nurse, clasping her hands with an air of pity, "well, he is dead!"

The King leaped to his feet, as if he had been acted on by a steel spring.

"Dead!" he cried.

"Alas! yes."

"Is it quite certain?"

"Yes."

"Official?"

"Yes."

"Has the news been made public?"

"Not yet."

"Then who told you the cardinal was dead?"

"M. Colbert."

"M. Colbert?"

"Yes."

"But was he himself sure of what he told you?"

"He was leaving the room, and had held a mirror before the cardinal's lips for some minutes."

"Ah!" said the King. "And what has become of M. Colbert?"

"He has just left his Eminence's bedroom."

"But where did he go then?"

"He followed me."

"So that now?"

"He is outside your door, Sire, waiting until it is your good pleasure to receive him."

Louis ran to the door, opened it himself, and saw Colbert standing and waiting in the lobby. The King started at sight of that statue-like form, all garbed in black.

Colbert bowed with profound respect, and advanced two steps toward his Majesty.

Louis turned back, after beckoning to Colbert to follow him into the chamber.

When Colbert had entered, Louis dismissed the nurse, who closed the door after her. Colbert remained modestly standing near the door.

"What have you to say to me, monsieur?" asked Louis, who could not entirely conceal the thoughts that were revolving in his mind, and was therefore considerably disturbed by this visit.

"That M. le Cardinal has just passed away, Sire, and that I bring you his last farewell."

The King reflected for a moment, with his eyes fixed on Colbert; evidently the last words of the cardinal had come back to him.

"You are M. Colbert, are you not?" he said.

"Yes, Sire."

"His Eminence's faithful servant, as I have been told by his Eminence himself?"

"Yes, Sire."

"The depository of some of his secrets?"

"Of all."

"The late cardinal's friends and servants are dear to me, monsieur, and I shall take care that you are assigned to a post in some of my offices."

Colbert bent low.

"You are, I think, a financier, monsieur?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And you were M. le Cardinal's steward?"

"I had that honor, Sire."

"You had no personal connection with my household, I believe?"

"Excuse me, Sire; I had the good fortune to suggest a reform to M. le Cardinal which puts three hundred thousand francs a year into your Majesty's coffers."

"What reform was that?"

"Your Majesty knows that the Cent-Swisses have silver lace on each side of their ribbons?"

"Of course."

"Well, Sire, I proposed to substitute imitation silver lace for real silver lace; no one would notice the difference, and a hundred thousand crowns would support a regiment for six months, or pay for ten thousand excellent muskets, or for a vessel of ten guns, ready for sea."

"That is true," said Louis XIV., examining the personage before him with more attention than ever, "and assuredly you have economized in the right direction; it was ridiculous to have soldiers wearing the same lace that noblemen wear."

"I am happy to have your Majesty's approval," answered Colbert.

"Did you hold any other post in connection with the cardinal?"

"His Eminence also charged me to examine the accounts of the superintendent, Sire."

"Ah!" exclaimed Louis, who had been about to dismiss Colbert, but who changed his mind on hearing these words; "ah! so you are the person his Eminence charged to examine the accounts of M. Fouquet? And what has been the result of your examination?"

"To show a deficit, Sire, — but, if your Majesty deign to permit me —"

"Speak, M. Colbert."

"I should give your Majesty some explanations."

"Not necessary, monsieur; you have audited the accounts; give me the result."

"That is easily done, Sire, — emptiness everywhere, money nowhere."

"Take care, monsieur; you are making a violent attack on the administration of M. Fouquet, who, from all I have heard, is a very able man."

Colbert became red and pale by turns; he felt that now he was entering on a struggle with a man whose power almost equalled that of the dead cardinal.

"Yes, Sire, a very able man," he repeated with a bow.

"But if M. Fouquet is an able man, and if money is wanting, in spite of his ability, who is to blame?"

"I do not accuse, Sire, I verify."

"All right; make up your accounts, and present them to me. A deficit may be temporary; when credit is restored, money returns with it."

"No, Sire."

"Oh, not this year, perhaps; I can easily understand that. But why not next year?"

"Next year is eaten as bare as this year."

"Well, the year after, then?"

"Like next year."

"Why, what is this you are telling me, M. Colbert?"

"I am telling you, Sire, that the revenues of the next four years are already mortgaged."

"So we must raise a loan, then."

"You must raise three, Sire."

"I will create offices to make them resign, and the money paid for them shall be lodged in the treasury."

"Impossible, Sire; office after office has been created already, their provisions being given in blank, so that those who have purchased them enjoy the proceeds of them without actually filling them. Your Majesty cannot, then, make them resign. Moreover, in every contract which M. le Surintendant has made, he has allowed a discount of one-third, so that the people are plundered, and that, too, without any profit to your Majesty."

The King started.

"Explain this to me, M. Colbert," said he.

"Would your Majesty deign to tell me clearly what you wish me to explain?"

"You are right. You wish for clearness, then?"

"Yes, Sire, clearness. God is God, above all things, because he has made light."

"Very well, then. Suppose, for instance, that, now that the cardinal is dead, I wanted some money."

"Your Majesty could not have any."

"Oh, monsieur, that is rather strange! Do you mean to say my superintendent could not procure money for me?"

Colbert's answer was a shake of his large head.

"What!" exclaimed the King; "are the revenues of the state so heavily mortgaged that there is no longer any revenue?"

"Yes, Sire."

The King frowned.

"If that is the case," said he, "I will call in the orders for payment and make the holders consent to a reduction, a settlement on easy terms."

"Impossible, for the orders have been converted into bills, and these bills are divided into so many parts, for the purpose of rendering the task of collecting the revenues easier, that it is now impossible to recognize the originals."

Louis strode up and down the room in a state of great agitation, and still frowning.

"But if what you say is true, M. Colbert," he said, suddenly stopping, "I am ruined even before I have begun to reign."

"Yes, Sire; you are," returned the impassive accountant.

"Still, there must be money somewhere, must there not?"

"Yes, Sire; and as a beginning, I bring to your Majesty a memorandum of certain funds which M. le Cardinal did not mention in his will or in any other act whatever, but which he confided to me."

"To you?"

"Yes, Sire, with an injunction to deliver them to your Majesty."

"What! these funds exist over and above the forty millions in the will?"

"Yes, Sire."

"M. de Mazarin had other funds besides?"

Colbert bowed.

"Why, that man must have been a gulf!" murmured the King. "M. de Mazarin on one side and M. Fouquet on the other; very likely, more than a hundred millions between them! No wonder my coffers are empty."

Colbert never moved; he waited.

"But is the sum you bring me worth the trouble?" asked the King.

"Yes, Sire; it is rather considerable."

"How much does it amount to?"

"Thirteen millions of livres, Sire."

"Thirteen millions!" exclaimed Louis, trembling with joy; "do you say thirteen millions, M. Colbert?"

"Yes, your Majesty, I said thirteen millions."

"Unknown to every one?"

"Unknown to every one."

"And in your hands?"

"Yes, Sire; in my hands."

"And which I can have?"

"In two hours."

"But where are they, pray?"

"In the cellar of a house which M. le Cardinal owned in the city, and which he had the kindness to bequeath to me in a special clause in his will."

"Then you are acquainted with the cardinal's will?"

"I have a duplicate of it, signed by his own hand."

"A duplicate?"

"Yes, Sire; and here it is."

Colbert quietly took the duplicate from his pocket and showed it to the King.

The King read the clause relating to the deeding of the house.

"But," said he, "there is mention here of the house, but there is no mention of the money."

"Excuse me, Sire, it is in my conscience."

"And M. de Mazarin trusted you to this degree?"

"Why not, Sire?"

"But he was a man who distrusted everybody."

"He did not distrust me, Sire, as your Majesty can see for yourself."

Louis gazed admiringly on that vulgar but expressive face.

"You are an honest man, M. Colbert," said he.

"That is not a virtue, Sire, it is a duty," Colbert answered coldly.

"But," added Louis XIV., "does not this money belong to the family?"

"If it belonged to the family it would have been set down

in the cardinal's will, like the rest of his fortune. If this money belonged to the family, I, who drew up the deed of gift in favor of your Majesty, would have added the sum of thirteen millions to the forty millions that were offered to you."

"What!" cried Louis XIV., "you were the person who drew up that deed of gift, M. Colbert?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And yet the cardinal was fond of you?" added the King, naïvely.

"Before I did so I told his Eminence that your Majesty would not accept it," replied Colbert, with that tranquil composure of which we have already spoken, and which gave a certain tone of solemnity even to the most ordinary affairs of life.

Louis pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Oh!" he murmured, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, "how young I am to be a ruler of men!"

Colbert waited for the end of this internal soliloquy, waited until the King raised his head.

"At what hour shall I send the money to your Majesty?" he inquired.

"At eleven to-night. I do not wish any one to know that I have this money."

Colbert did not answer or give the slightest sign that these words were intended for his ears.

"Is this sum in ingots or gold coin?" continued the King.

"In gold coin, Sire."

"Good."

"Where shall I send it?"

"To the Louvre. Thank you, M. Colbert."

Colbert bowed himself out.

"Thirteen millions!" exclaimed Louis when he was alone; "why, it is a dream!"

Then he let his head fall between his hands and for a time it looked as if he had really fallen asleep.

But in a few moments he raised it again, shook his beautiful locks, rose up, and throwing the window open violently, bathed his heated temples in the keen morning air heavy with the pungent odors of the trees and the sweet perfumes of the flowers.

A splendid dawn was rising above the horizon, and the first rays of the sun flamed on the brow of the youthful monarch.

"Is this dawn the dawn of my reign?" murmured Louis XIV. "Is it, O omnipotent God! a presage which Thou sendest me?"

CHAPTER L.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE KING'S ROYALTY.

The news of the cardinal's death was spread throughout the château in the morning, and from the château it spread throughout the city.

The ministers, Fouquet, Lyonne, and Letellier, entered the council chamber for the purpose of holding a council.

The King at once ordered them to be summoned to his presence.

"Gentlemen," said he, "M. le Cardinal has passed away. I allowed him to have the direction of my affairs; but now I intend to manage them myself. You will give me your advice whenever I call for it. Go."

The ministers stared at one another in astonishment. They succeeded in hiding a smile, but it was with a great effort, for they felt assured that the prince, whose training had left him absolutely ignorant of state affairs, was, from mere vanity, undertaking a task far too heavy for his strength.

Fouquet took leave of his colleagues as they were descending the staircase, saying:

"Gentlemen, so much the less work for us."

And he entered his carriage gayly.

But the others were a little anxious about the turn events might take, and they set out together for Paris.

Toward ten the King went to his mother's apartments; the interview between them was of a very confidential character; then, after dinner, he was driven in a closed carriage straight to the Louvre. There he received a large number of persons, and took a certain pleasure in noticing their embarrassment and curiosity.

Shortly before nightfall he commanded all the gates of the Louvre to be shut, except the one opening on the quay. At this gate he stationed two hundred Swiss, who did not speak a word of French. They had orders to admit none except

those who brought parcels or barrels with them, and not to allow any one to go out.

At eleven exactly he heard the rumbling of a wagon at the gate, then of another, then of a third, and then the grating of the gate on its hinges as it was being closed.

Soon afterwards some one scratched on the door of his study. The King opened it himself, and met Colbert, whose first words were:

"The money is in your Majesty's cellar."

Thereupon Louis went down to the cellar and examined the casks, filled with gold and silver, which four of Colbert's servants were rolling into a vault, the key of which had been given to Colbert that very morning by the King himself. The inspection completed, he returned to his study, followed by Colbert, whose unalterable coldness was proof against any warmth excited by his personal gratification.

"Monsieur," said he, "what reward would you like to have in return for such devotion and honesty?"

"Absolutely none, Sire."

"What! none? not even an opportunity to serve me?"

"Though your Majesty did not grant me that opportunity, I should serve you none the less. I cannot help being the very best servant of my King."

"I appoint you intendant of finance, M. Colbert."

"But there is a superintendent, Sire?"

"Of course."

"Sire, the superintendent is the most powerful man in your realm."

"Ah!" cried Louis reddening, "do you believe that?"

"Sire, he will crush me to powder in a week; in short, to fill the office which your Majesty gives me, strength is indispensable. To be an intendant under a superintendent means weakness."

"You wish to be supported. Do you not think you can rely upon me?"

"I had the honor of telling your Majesty that, so long as M. de Mazarin lived, M. Fouquet was the second person in the realm; now that M. de Mazarin is dead, M. Fouquet has become the first."

"Monsieur, to-day I permit you to speak to me in whatever manner you like; but after to-day I shall no longer allow you to do so."

"Then I am to be useless to your Majesty?"

"You are so already, since you refuse to compromise yourself by serving me."

"What I fear is to be placed in such a position that I cannot serve you."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want your Majesty to appoint auxiliaries to assist me in the duties of the office."

"But will not your post lose somewhat in importance?"

"It will gain in security."

"Choose your colleagues, then."

"MM. Breteuil, Marin, Hervard."

"To-morrow the ordinance will appear."

"Thanks, Sire."

"Is that all you ask for?"

"No, Sire; I have to ask for something else."

"What is it?"

"To be empowered to form a Chamber of Justice."

"A Chamber of Justice! for what purpose?"

"To try the farmers-general and their accomplices who have been robbing the treasury for the last ten years."

"But — what will it do to them?"

"Hang three and make the rest disgorge."

"Still, I cannot begin my reign with executions, M. Colbert."

"Yes, Sire, in order not to have to end it with executions."

The King did not answer.

"Does your Majesty consent?" said Colbert.

"I will reflect, monsieur."

"The reflection will come too late."

"Why?"

"Because we have to deal with people who will be stronger than we are if they are put on their guard."

"Form your Chamber of Justice, M. Colbert."

"I will do so, Sire."

"Is that all?"

"No, Sire; there is another matter of importance. What rights does your Majesty associate with the office of intendant?"

"Why — I do not know — the usual ones, I suppose —"

"Sire, it is necessary that the person holding the office of intendant should have the right to read the correspondence

from England. This is a right I am particularly anxious to possess."

"Impossible, monsieur, for that correspondence was only opened in the council and then by M. le Cardinal himself."

"I understood your Majesty to declare this morning that you would no longer have a council."

"Yes, so I declared."

"Then your Majesty will be graciously pleased to read all your letters — especially those from England — yourself and in private; I attach particular importance to this point."

"Monsieur, you shall have the correspondence and give me an account of it."

"Now, Sire, what shall I do with respect to the finances?"

"All that M. Fouquet will not do."

"That is what I wanted to know from your Majesty. Thanks, Sire, my mind is now easy."

And then he passed out. Louis looked at him as he did so. Before Colbert had gone a hundred yards from the Louvre the King received a courier from England. After examining and feeling the envelope, the King broke the seal hurriedly, and found within a letter from Charles II. The English prince wrote to his royal brother as follows:

"Your Majesty must be very much disturbed by the illness of M. le Cardinal de Mazarin; but the excess of the danger can only be of service to you. The cardinal is given over by his physician. I thank you for your gracious reply to my communication with regard to Lady Henrietta Stuart, my sister; in a week the princess and her court will start for Paris.

"I take great pleasure in acknowledging the fraternal friendship you have always shown toward me and in being able to say that you are now more my brother than ever. But I take even greater pleasure in proving to your Majesty how anxious I am to do everything that may be agreeable to you. You are having Belle-Isle-en-Mer secretly fortified. That is wrong. We shall never be at war. That measure does not, therefore, give me any uneasiness, but it saddens me. You are spending useless millions there; be sure to tell your ministers so, and rest assured that I am well informed. You will, my brother, render me the same service in a similar contingency."

The King rang violently and his valet de chambre appeared.

"M. Colbert has just gone, but cannot be far away. Let him be called back," he cried.

The valet de chambre was starting to execute the order, when the King stopped him.

"No," said he, "no — I now see his entire plan. Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet. If M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle, he is conspiring. The discovery of the superintendent's conspiracy is his ruin, and the discovery is made by means of the English correspondence. This is why Colbert wished to have that correspondence. Oh! but I cannot place all my reliance on that man; he is only the head, I require an arm also."

Then a joyful exclamation escaped suddenly from the King's lips.

"I had," said he to the valet de chambre, "a lieutenant of musketeers?"

"Yes, Sire; M. d'Artagnan."

"Who left my service temporarily?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Find him and tell him to be at my levee to-morrow morning."

The valet de chambre bowed and passed out.

After he was gone, the King murmured:

"Thirteen millions in my cellar; Colbert holding my purse and D'Artagnan bearing my sword — I am King!"

CHAPTER LI.

A PASSION.

Athos, as we have seen, went directly from the Palais-Royal to his hotel in the Rue Saint-Honoré on the very day of his arrival.

There he found the Vicomte de Bragelonne, who, while waiting for him, was trying to carry on a conversation with Grimaud.

Talking with the old servant was no easy matter; only two men held the secret of doing so successfully — Athos and D'Artagnan. The first succeeded because Grimaud liked to

make his master talk; the second, because he knew how to make Grimaud talk.

Raoul had been endeavoring to draw from Grimaud the details of the journey to England, and Grimaud had related them by means of a certain number of gestures accompanied by eight words, neither more nor less. He had begun with an undulating movement of the hand: it indicated that he and his master had crossed the sea.

"Upon some expedition or other?" Raoul had asked.

A bend of Grimaud's head answered:

"Yes."

"In which M. le Comte was exposed to many and great perils?" inquired Raoul.

A slight shrug of Grimaud's shoulders meant:

"Not too many, nor too few."

"Yes, but what kind of perils were they?" insisted Raoul.

Grimaud pointed to the sword, to the fire, and to the musket hanging from the wall.

"So M. le Comte had an enemy over yonder?" exclaimed Raoul.

"Monk," answered Grimaud.

"It is strange," continued Raoul, "that M. le Comte should persist in regarding me as a novice, and unfit to share the perils he encounters."

Grimaud smiled.

This was the very moment when Athos was entering. The host was lighting him up the stairs. When Grimaud recognized the step of his master he ran to meet him, and this cut short the conversation.

But once started on the path of inquiry, Raoul could not stop. Seizing the count's hands, he said, with an air of eager but respectful tenderness:

"How is it, monsieur, that you have taken a dangerous journey without bidding me farewell, without asking me to aid you with my sword, now that I am strong enough to give you that assistance which it is my duty to give you, especially as you have trained me to be a man? Ah! monsieur, why should you expose me to the cruel trial of never seeing you again?"

"Who told you, Raoul, that the journey was a dangerous one?" returned the count, after handing his cloak and hat to Grimaud, who had just unbuckled his sword.

"I," said Grimaud.

"And why did you do so?" asked Athos, sternly.

Grimaud was embarrassed; Raoul came to his relief, and replied in his stead:

"It is natural, monsieur, that our worthy Grimaud should tell me the truth in matters that concern you. Who has as good a right to love and aid you as I have?"

Athos did not answer. He made a friendly sign to Grimaud to withdraw; he then sat down in an armchair, while Raoul continued to stand before him.

"But the fact remains," Raoul went on, "that you have been on an expedition, and have been exposed to perils from fire and sword."

"We need not speak further on that subject," said Athos, gently. "It is true I started in a hurry; but the interests of King Charles II. made it necessary for me to do so. I am grateful, however, for your solicitude, and I know I can always rely on you. You have not wanted for anything in my absence, count, have you?"

"Thanks, monsieur, no."

"I ordered Blaisois to pay you a hundred pistoles, should you need money."

"I have not seen Blaisois, monsieur."

"You have been able to do without money, then?"

"I had thirty pistoles left from the sale of the horses I captured in the last campaign, and M. le Prince was kind enough to let me win two hundred pistoles at his card-table three months ago."

"You play? — I do not like that, Raoul."

"I never play, monsieur; it was M. le Prince who ordered me to hold his cards at Chantilly — one night that a courier came for the King. I obeyed and won. M. le Prince bade me keep the stakes."

"Is that a custom in his household, Raoul?" inquired Athos, frowning.

"Yes, monsieur; every week M. le Prince finds some opportunity or other of allowing one of his gentlemen to reap the same advantage. His Highness has fifty gentlemen, and it was my turn."

"Indeed! So you have been in Spain?"

"Yes, monsieur, and had a very pleasant and interesting journey."

"You returned a month ago, did you not?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And during that month?"

"During that month —"

"What have you been doing?"

"I have been on service, monsieur."

"You have not paid a visit to La Fère?"

Raoul changed color. Athos looked at him firmly but calmly.

"You would be doing me an injustice if you did not believe me," said Raoul, "although I am well aware that I have blushed; I did so in spite of myself, however. The question you have done me the honor of asking is one that moves me strongly. If I blush, then, it is because I am moved, not because I am lying."

"I am well aware, Raoul, that you never lie."

"Never, monsieur."

"Besides, my friend, you are mistaken; what I meant —"

"I know what you meant, monsieur. You intended to ask me if I have been at Blois."

"Precisely."

"I have not, monsieur; I have not even seen the person about whom you desire to speak."

The voice of Raoul trembled as he uttered these words. Athos, who was a sovereign judge in all matters of delicacy, immediately added:

"Raoul, there is some painful feeling at the bottom of your answer; you suffer."

"Grievously, monsieur; you have forbidden me to go to Blois or to see Mademoiselle de la Vallière again —"

Here the young man paused. That sweet name, so full of charm, while resting on his lips like a caress, made his heart bleed.

"And I have done well, Raoul," Athos hastened to answer. "I am not an unjust or barbarous father; I respect true love; but I am thinking of your future, and that future should be a great one. A new reign is about to dawn upon us in all its splendor. War beckons to a young King full of chivalrous ardor. That chivalrous ardor needs to be supplemented by a battalion of young lieutenants, free from all ties, who will rush to the fight with enthusiasm and fall, crying, 'Vive le Roi!' instead of 'Farewell, my wife!' You understand me, Raoul.

However cold-blooded my reasoning may seem to you, then, I conjure you to believe me and turn away your thoughts from those early days of your youth when you learned to love — days of voluptuous carelessness that weaken the heart and leave no place in it for those strong, bitter draughts called glory and adversity. Therefore, Raoul, I again conjure you to believe that my advice is solely prompted by the desire to be useful to you, that my sole ambition is for your prosperity. I think that you are capable of becoming a distinguished man. March alone, and you will march better and more quickly."

"You have ordered, monsieur, and I obey."

"Ordered!" exclaimed Athos. "Is it thus you answer me? I have ordered you! Oh! you give as wrong a significance to my words as you do to my intentions. I have not ordered, I have pleaded."

"No, monsieur," replied Raoul, stubbornly, "you have ordered. But though you had uttered only a request, a request from you would be more effective than an order. I have not seen Mademoiselle de la Vallière again."

"But you suffer! You are unhappy!" insisted Athos.

Raoul did not answer.

"You look pale and melancholy — the sentiment you entertain must, then, be a very strong one?"

"It is a passion," replied Raoul.

"No — a habit."

"Monsieur, you know that I have travelled much, have spent two years away from her. Now, I imagine a person ought to be able to break off a habit in two years. Well, when I returned I was as much in love as when I went away; to be more so would be impossible. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is the only woman in the world for me, but you are a god upon earth for me — to you I will sacrifice everything."

"Then you would be acting wrongly," said Athos, "I have no longer any right over you. Your age frees you from my control, and you do not even need my consent. Besides, after what you have said I will not refuse it. If you wish to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, you may do so."

Raoul started, then said, hurriedly:

"You are very kind, monsieur, and your consent lays me under the deepest obligation; but I cannot accept it."

"So that now you refuse?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I do not want to thwart you in anything, Raoul."

"Still at bottom you are opposed to this marriage. It is not the one you have designed for me."

"Very true."

"That is reason enough to make me not persist; I shall wait."

"Take care, Raoul! What you are saying is serious."

"I am aware of that; still, I repeat that I shall wait."

"Do you mean you intend to wait until I am dead?" said Athos, much agitated.

"Oh! monsieur!" cried Raoul, in a voice that shook with emotion, "would you wound the heart of one who has never given you cause to reproach him?"

"My dear child, you are right," murmured Athos, compressing his lips tightly to avoid showing the feelings of which he was no longer master. "No, I do not wish to pain you. But I do not understand what you mean by waiting. Will you wait till you love no longer?"

"Wait till then? Ah! no, monsieur. But wait until you have changed your mind."

"I want to put this matter to the proof, Raoul. I want to see whether Mademoiselle de la Vallière is going to wait as you are."

"I hope so, monsieur."

"But be on your guard, Raoul. What if Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not wait? Ah! you are so young, so trustful, and loyal — and women are so fickle."

"You have never spoken ill of women to me, monsieur. They have never given you any cause to complain of them. Why, then, should you speak ill of them in connection with Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"True," answered the count, lowering his eyes, "I have never spoken ill of women to you, and they have never given me cause of complaint. Mademoiselle de la Vallière has, certainly, never given me the slightest ground for entertaining any suspicion in her regard. But in looking into the future we must be prepared for what is exceptional and even improbable. I repeat, then, what if Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not wait for you?"

"What do you mean, monsieur?"

"What if her eyes turned in another direction?"

"Looked with favor on another man, do you mean, monsieur?" exclaimed Raoul, pale with agony.

"Precisely."

"Then, monsieur, I would kill that man," said Raoul, quietly, "and every other man that pleased her, until one of them had killed me or Mademoiselle de la Vallière had given me back my heart."

Athos started.

"I had thought," he answered, in a hollow voice, "that you regarded me a moment ago as your god, your law in this world?"

"Oh!" returned Raoul, trembling, "you would forbid me to take part in a duel?"

"And if I did, Raoul?"

"You would forbid me to hope, monsieur, and, therefore, you could not forbid me to die."

Athos gazed steadily at the vicomte.

The tone in which Raoul had uttered these words was gloomy, but the expression that accompanied them was gloomier still.

"Enough," said the count, after a long silence, "enough, the subject is a melancholy one, and both of us have indulged somewhat in exaggeration. Live your ordinary life, Raoul, perform your ordinary duties, love Mademoiselle de la Vallière; in short, now that you have reached a man's age, act like a man. But never forget that I love you tenderly and that you have acknowledged you love me."

"Ah! M. le Comte!" cried Raoul, pressing his father's hand to his heart.

"And now, my dear boy," said Athos, "leave me. I have need of repose. And, by the way, M. d'Artagnan returned with me from England; you owe him a visit."

"A debt it will give me the greatest pleasure to pay. I am very fond of M. d'Artagnan."

"And you are right; he is an honorable man and a brave cavalier."

"And he is deeply attached to you."

"I am sure of that. Do you know his address?"

"At the Louvre, or the Palais-Royal, or wherever the King happens to be, I presume. Does he not command the musketeers?"

"Not at present; M. d'Artagnan is now absent on leave; he is resting for a time. You will not find him, therefore, at the posts of his service. A man named Planchet will tell you where he is."

"The man who used to be his servant?"

"The same; he has become a grocer."

"I know. The Rue des Lombards?"

"I think that is the street — or perhaps the Rue des Arcis."

"I am sure to find it, monsieur."

"You will give him my very best regards, and bring him to dine with me before I leave for La Fère."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Good-evening, Raoul."

"Monsieur, I have noticed that you are wearing an order I never saw on you before; allow me to congratulate you."

"The Golden Fleece? You are right. A toy, my dear boy, which no longer amuses even an old child like myself. Good-night, Raoul!"

CHAPTER LII.

D'ARTAGNAN'S LESSON.

Raoul could not find D'Artagnan the next day, as he had hoped. He met only Planchet, who was delighted to see the young man again, and who paid him two or three soldierly compliments, not at all smacking of the warehouse. But when, on the day after, Raoul was returning from Vincennes with fifty dragoons, placed under his orders by M. le Prince, he noticed a man who, with nose tiptilted, was examining a house with the intentness usually displayed by the would-be purchaser of a horse.

This man had on a citizen's frock, buttoned up like a soldier's doublet, a very small hat on his head, and a very long sword in a shagreen scabbard at his side. He turned his head when he heard the steps of the horses, and took his eyes away from the house to look at the dragoons.

This individual was none other than M. d'Artagnan; D'Artagnan on foot; D'Artagnan inspecting, with his hands behind his back, the horses, after having inspected the houses. Not a man or shoulder-knot or horse-shoe escaped his scrutiny.

Raoul rode at the side of his troop. He was the last horseman that D'Artagnan remarked.

"Eh!" he exclaimed; "why, *mordioux!*"

"Then I am not mistaken?" cried Raoul, pushing forward.

"No, you are not mistaken; good-day to you," answered the ex-musketeer.

Raoul seized the hand of his old friend eagerly.

"Look out, Raoul," said D'Artagnan. "The second horse in the fifth rank will lose a shoe before you reach the Pont Marie. There are only two nails left in his off fore-foot."

"Wait for me," said Raoul; "I am going with you."

"Can you leave your detachment?"

"The cornet will take my place."

"You will dine with me, then?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Then come along quick. Leave your horse, or if you don't get one for me."

"I prefer walking with you."

Raoul rode off to tell the cornet to take his post. Then he alighted, gave his horse to one of the dragoons, and joyously took the arm of M. d'Artagnan, who had been watching him during all these evolutions with the satisfaction of a connoisseur.

"So you have come from Vincennes?" were his next words.

"Yes, M. le Chevalier."

"And the cardinal?"

"Is very sick; there is even a rumor of his death."

"How do you and M. Fouquet get along?" inquired D'Artagnan, at the same time indicating by a disdainful shrug of the shoulders that Mazarin's death did not affect him very deeply.

"I and M. Fouquet?" answered Raoul. "Why, I am not acquainted with him!"

"So much the worse! so much the worse! A new king is always in need of new favorites."

"Oh, the King is not unfriendly to me," replied the young man.

"I am not speaking of the person who wears the crown, but of the king," said D'Artagnan. "Now that M. le Cardinal is dead, M. Fouquet is the king. You must try to be on very good terms indeed with M. Fouquet, if you do not want to have your whole life wasted as mine has been. True, you have other protectors — lucky for you that it is so."

"You mean M. le Prince?"

"His day is past, my young friend."

"M. le Comte de la Fère?"

"Athos? Oh, that is a different matter; yes, Athos — that is, if you wish to carve out a career for yourself in England. In that case, no one can aid you better. Nay, I can affirm, without being accused of vanity, that even I myself have some influence at the court of Charles II. There 's a king for you, and no mistake!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, with the natural curiosity of young men of gentle birth when listening to valor and experience.

"Yes, a king who, it is true, is fond of pleasure, but a king who has learned how to handle a sword, and to appreciate useful men. Athos is on good terms with Charles II. Enter his service, then; get away from those rascally revenue collectors who prove that French hands can filch as deftly as Italian fingers; get away from this little whimperer of a king who is going to give us another such reign as that of François II. Do you know history, Raoul?"

"Yes, M. le Chevalier."

"Then you know that François II. always had the earache?"

"No, I was not aware of that."

"That Charles IX. always had the headache?"

"Ah!"

"And Henri III. always the stomach-ache?"

Raoul burst out laughing.

"Well, my dear boy, Louis XIV. always has the heart-ache. A king who sighs from morning to night is a deplorable spectacle; a king who never the entire day breaks out with a *ventre-saint-gris!* or a *corbœuf!* or some word with a little life in it!"

"And that is why you left his service, M. le Chevalier?"

"Yes."

"But if you yourself, M. d'Artagnan, throw the heft after the hatchet in this fashion you will never make your fortune."

"Oh," answered D'Artagnan, nonchalantly, "I am well fixed. I had some family property."

Raoul stared at him. The poverty of D'Artagnan had become proverbial. As a Gascon he might indulge in a little gasconading on the subject of his ill luck: nothing like it was ever known in France and Navarre. Raoul had heard the names of D'Artagnan and Job linked together a hundred times, like the twin names of Romulus and Remus.

D'Artagnan noticed Raoul's look of amazement.

"So your father did not tell you I had been in England?"

"Yes, he did, M. le Chevalier."

"And that I had a very lucky adventure there?"

"No, monsieur, I have learned nothing of that."

"Yes, a high and mighty lord, one of my good friends, the viceroy of Ireland and Scotland, put me in the way of discovering my inheritance."

"An inheritance, monsieur?"

"A rather valuable one, too."

"And so you are now rich?"

"Oh, so-so."

"Accept my sincere congratulations."

"Thanks. But stay, we are near my house."

"Here, on the Place de Grève?"

"Yes; you do not fancy the neighborhood?"

"Quite the contrary; there is a fine view of the river from it. What a pretty, old-fashioned house!"

"It was formerly a tavern — the '*Image-Notre-Dame*.' I converted it into a mansion only a couple of days ago."

"But the tavern is still open?"

"Of course it is."

"And where do you lodge?"

"Oh, at Planchet's."

"Yet you said a moment ago, 'We are near my house'?"

"I said so because it is my house. I have bought it."

"Really!"

"At ten years' purchase, my dear Raoul; a splendid bargain! Bought it for thirty thousand livres: it has a garden on the Rue de la Mortellerie. I have let the tavern and the first story for a thousand livres, and the garret, or second story, for five hundred."

"You don't say so!"

"But I do."

"A garret for five hundred livres! Why, no one can live in it."

"And no one does live in it. But, if you look, you'll see the garret has two windows opening on the Place."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, when any one is to be broken on the wheel, or hanged, or quartered, or burned, these windows can be let for twenty pistoles."

"Oh!" cried Raoul, horrified.

"Disgusting, is it not?" said D'Artagnan.

"Oh!" repeated Raoul.

"Yes, it is disgusting, but such is life. These Parisian cockneys are sometimes regular cannibals. I cannot conceive how men who call themselves Christians can make a profit out of such morbid curiosity."

"You are right there."

"Why," continued D'Artagnan, "if I lived in that house I would, whenever there was an execution, shut up everything, even stuff the keyholes."

"And still you let this garret for five hundred livres?"

"Yes, to that heartless tavern-keeper, who makes a good profit by subletting it, — fifteen hundred livres, I think I told you."

"The regular interest of the money you invested at five per cent.," said Raoul.

"Correct. But I also own the buildings in the rear, containing warehouses, apartments, cellars, — flooded, by the way, every winter, — that means two hundred livres additional, — as well as a fine, well-stocked garden, sheltered by the walls and portal of Saint-Gervais and Saint-Protais, let for thirteen hundred livres."

"Thirteen hundred livres! An extraordinary price that!"

"It is; but perhaps the story I am going to tell you will explain it. I suspect the person who rented it is some canon or other of the parish (all these canons are as rich as Crœsus) and that he wants it for his pleasures. The tenant said his name was Godard. Now this is either a true or a false name; if it be a true one, he is a canon; if a false one, he is a stranger. But what have I to do with that? He always pays in advance. I had also a notion, when I met you, of purchasing a house on the Place Baudoyer, the back premises of which join my garden. The whole would form a magnificent property. Those dragoons of yours played the mischief with my calculations — come, let us take the Rue de la Vannerie, it leads direct to Planchet's."

D'Artagnan quickened his pace, and they were soon at the grocer's and in the room Planchet had set aside for his former master. Although he was not at home, dinner had been served to the minute, for this worthy tradesman retained a remnant of his military regularity and punctuality.

D'Artagnan returned to the subject of Raoul's future.

"Your father treats you with some rigor?" said he.

"But with justice, monsieur."

"Oh, I know that Athos is just, but close, perhaps, eh?"

"His liberality is princely, monsieur."

"Well, if ever you are in need of a few pistoles, don't be shy, my lad; you know where the old musketeer is to be found."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan —"

"You play a little now and then?"

"Never."

"Successful with the ladies, eh? You blush. Aha! my little Aramis! My dear fellow, that is a costlier amusement than gambling. It is true we fight when we lose; that is a compensation. But, pshaw! this little sneak of a King makes you pay a fine if you venture to draw your sword. What a reign, my poor Raoul, what a reign! And to think that in my time the musketeers had to stand a siege in their houses like Hector and Priam in the city of Troy! And the wailing of the women, and the laughing from the walls, and five hundred rapscallions clapping their hands and shrieking, 'Kill them! kill them!' and not a single musketeer of us with a scratch at the end of it! *Mordioux!* you fellows will never see anything like that!"

"You are terribly hard on the King, my dear M. d'Artagnan, and yet you scarcely know him."

"I hard on him! Listen, Raoul, and mark my words. I can predict what this King will do, day after day and hour after hour. As soon as the cardinal is dead, he will weep. Well, that is by no means the silliest thing he will do, particularly if he does not really care a single tear for him."

"And then?"

"And then he will persuade M. Fouquet to grant him a pension, and will retire to Fontainebleau to compose verses on some Mancini or other whose eyes the queen will be ready to tear out. She is a Spaniard, is this queen of ours, you see, and her mother-in-law is Madame Anne of Austria. I know something of the Spanish dames of the House of Austria."

"And then?"

"And then after tearing the silver lace from the Swiss because silver lace is such a costly article, he will deprive the musketeers of their horses, because the oats and hay needed for a horse cost five sols a day."

"Oh, that's going too far."

"Why, what is it to me? I am no longer a musketeer, am I? What concern is it of mine whether they are on horseback or on foot, whether they carry a larding-pin, or a spit, or a sword, or anything, for that matter?"

"I entreat you, my dear M. d'Artagnan, not to speak ill of the King to me any further. I am, in a certain sense, in his service, and my father would be very angry if he heard I listened to words offensive to his Majesty, even from your lips."

"Your father? Oh, your father is a knight who will defend any cause, however preposterous. Yes, of course, your father is a hero, a Cæsar; but he is no judge of character."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Raoul, with a laugh. "So now you are having a turn at my father, the man you are in the habit of calling the great Athos! You are in a rather peppery humor to-day, and wealth seems to have soured you, as poverty does other people."

"*Pardieu!* You are right. I am a cross-grained brute, in my last dotage; an old wretch, a forage-cord untwisted, a cuirass with a hole in it, a boot without a sole, a spur without a rowel. But do me a favor, repeat this after me."

"Repeat what, my dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"Repeat these words: 'M. de Mazarin was a ragamuffin.'"

"But he may be dead."

"The more reason to do as I ask you. I said *was;* if I did not hope he was dead, I should have requested you to say: 'Mazarin *is* a ragamuffin.' Do it, Raoul, for my sake."

"Oh, I am perfectly willing."

"Well, say it."

"'Mazarin was a ragamuffin,'" repeated Raoul, smiling at the musketeer, who had recovered all the geniality of his best days.

"Stay a moment," the Gascon went on. "You have stated the first of the premises: now for the conclusion. Repeat after me, Raoul: 'But I am inclined to regret Mazarin.'"

"Chevalier!"

"Well, as you won't say it, I shall say it twice for you; 'But I am inclined to regret Mazarin.'"

They were still laughing and discussing this formal expression of a declaration of principles, when one of the shop-boys entered.

"A letter," said he, "for M. d'Artagnan."

"Thanks — Hullo!" cried the musketeer.

"M. le Comte's writing," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes."

And D'Artagnan broke the seal.

"*My dear friend,*" wrote Athos, "*I have just been requested to send for you, on the part of the King.*"

"Send for me?" exclaimed D'Artagnan, letting the paper fall from his hand to the table.

Raoul picked it up, and read aloud:

"*Make haste. His Majesty is particularly desirous to speak with you, and is expecting you at the Louvre.*"

"Expecting me?" repeated the musketeer.

"Oho!" said Raoul.

"Oh! what can be the meaning of this?" answered D'Artagnan.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE KING.

When the first moment of astonishment had passed, D'Artagnan read the note of Athos again.

"It is strange," said he, "that the King should want me now."

"Why not, monsieur?" answered Raoul. "Is it not natural for the King to regret the absence of such a faithful servant as you are?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the officer, laughing sardonically, "a pretty story you are telling me, Master Raoul! If the King regretted my absence, he would not have let me leave him. No, no, there is something better — or worse — in all this, according to how you look at it."

"Something worse! How can that be, M. le Chevalier?"

"You are young and confiding, in every way admirable. How I should like to be just where you are! To be twenty-four, to have a forehead without a wrinkle and a head with room for nothing in it except love and women and good intentions. Oh, Raoul, so long as you have not received the smiles of kings and become the confidant of queens; so long as you have not seen the death of two cardinals, the one a tiger,

the other a fox; so long as you have not — but what rambling nonsense! I must leave you, Raoul!"

"Why, with what an air of solemnity you speak these words!"

"The occasion may well demand it. Listen: I want you to do me a favor."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan, I am all attention."

"You will start at once and inform your father of my departure."

"You are going away?"

"I should think I am! Tell him I have started for England and intend living in my little country house."

"Started for England! — you! — and the King's orders?"

"You are simpler than I fancied. Do you imagine I am about to go to the Louvre and let that little crowned wolf-cub do what he likes with me?"

"The King a wolf-cub! Why, M. le Chevalier, you must be crazy!"

"On the contrary, I was never more in my senses. You don't know, then, how that worthy son of Louis the Just intends to treat me? But, *mordioux!* this will be a state affair. He wants to clap me into the Bastille; there you have it all in a nutshell."

"But for what reason?" asked Raoul, who was now quite scared.

"Reason, indeed! Because I said certain things to him on a certain day at Blois. I was rather sharp with him; he remembers it."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I told him that he was a simpleton, a skinflint, and a blackguard."

"Great God!" cried Raoul; "can words like those have ever fallen from your lips?"

"Perhaps these were not the exact words; but, at least, that is what they meant."

"But the King would have had you arrested at once!"

"Arrested by whom? I commanded the musketeers. He would have had to command me to lead myself to prison. I would never have consented to that. I would have refused to take myself into custody. Then I passed over to England — nothing more was heard of D'Artagnan — to-day the cardinal

is dead, or very near it; they have found out I am in Paris, and so they lay their hands on me."

"Then the cardinal was your protector?"

"Oh, the cardinal and I were well acquainted. He knew certain secrets of mine, and I knew certain secrets of his. We understood each other — and I have no doubt that, when he was giving his soul back to the devil, he advised Anne of Austria to see to my lodgings. Go, then, and inform your father of what has occurred — and adieu!"

"My dear M. d'Artagnan," said Raoul, after looking out of the window, "you cannot escape."

"Why?"

"Because there is an officer belonging to the Swiss waiting for you downstairs."

"What then?"

"He will arrest you."

D'Artagnan broke out into a burst of Homeric laughter.

"Oh, I am well aware you will resist, will fight him even, and of course be the conqueror. But that amounts to rebellion; you are an officer yourself, and know the meaning of discipline."

"Confound the boy!" growled D'Artagnan, "what a logical training he has had!"

"You agree with me, do you not?"

"Yes. Instead of escaping by the street, where that lout is waiting for me, I will slip out quietly through the back door. I have a horse in the stable; he is a good one, too. I will ride him till he drops, then purchase another, then another; my means allow me to kill as many horses as I like. In this way I shall reach Boulogne in eleven hours; I know the road. You will say just one thing more to your father."

"What is it?"

"It is that — he is well aware of what I have placed in Planchet's hands — all except a fifth, and that — "

"But, my dear M. d'Artagnan, you had better consider. If you fly, there will be two things said about you — "

"What are they, my dear friend?"

"First, that you were afraid."

"Really! Who will say that?"

"The King will be the first to say it."

"Well — he will be saying the truth. I am afraid."

"Secondly, that you felt you were guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Of the crimes which they impute to you."

"What you say is true enough. So you think I had better get myself penned in the Bastille?"

"M. le Comte de la Fère would give you the same advice I am giving you."

"I know it well, *pardieu!*" answered D'Artagnan, thoughtfully. "You are right, I shall not escape. But if they lock me up in the Bastille?"

"We will drag you out of it," said Raoul, calmly.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, taking his hand, "that was bravely spoken, spoken exactly in the manner of Athos. Good-bye, I leave you. Don't forget my last words."

"All except a fifth," answered Raoul.

"Yes, you are a charming young fellow, and I wish you to add a few words more to the last."

"What are they?"

"If you do not succeed in pulling me out of the Bastille, and I should die there — oh! such things have occurred — and although I have been a fairly good sort of person, I think I should make an execrable prisoner — in that case I leave three-fifths to you, and the fourth to your father."

"Chevalier!"

"*Mordioux!* if you persist in getting it out of me, have a few masses said for me; that is all."

When he had finished speaking he took down his belt from the hook, buckled on his sword, donned a hat with a new feather, and offered his hand to Raoul, who flung himself into his arms.

Once in the shop he glanced round at the shop-boys, who looked on at the scene with a mixture of pride and uneasiness. Then, after plunging his hand into a barrel of currants, he marched up to the officer, who was awaiting his coming philosophically at the shop-door.

"These features! Why, it is yourself, M. de Friedisch!" cried the musketeer, gayly. "Aha! so now we are engaged in arresting our friends, are we?"

"Arrested!" whispered the lads in the shop.

"Yes, it is meinself," said the Swiss. "Goot-tay, Munseer d'Artagnan."

"Have I to give you my sword? I warn you that it is both long and heavy. Let me keep it until we are near the Louvre. I look awfully stupid when I happen to be in the streets with-

out my sword, and you would look still stupider if you had to carry two of them."

"You can keep your sword," answered the Swiss. "The King said noding apout it."

"That was very nice of the King. Let us get on faster."

M. de Friedisch was not a talker, and D'Artagnan had too much to think about to be one. It was not far from Planchet's shop to the Louvre, and they arrived there in ten minutes. It was now nightfall.

M. de Friedisch wished to enter by the wicket.

"No," said D'Artagnan, "we should lose time if we do. Better go up the little staircase."

The Swiss agreed to D'Artagnan's request, and led him to the vestibule of Louis XIV.'s cabinet.

Then he bowed to his prisoner, and went back silently to his post.

While D'Artagnan was still wondering why his sword had not been taken from him, the door of the cabinet opened, and a valet de chambre called:

"M. d'Artagnan!"

The musketeer at once held himself as if on parade, and entered, his eyes wide open, his face calm, and his mustache stiff.

The King was sitting at a table writing.

He did not move at the sound of the musketeer's steps on the floor, did not even turn his head. D'Artagnan advanced to the centre of the apartment, and, remarking that the King did not pay the slightest attention to him, and, moreover, having a shrewd guess that all this was affectation, a sort of preliminary to the explanation that must take place, and intended to intimidate him, he turned his back on the prince and became absorbed in the task of inspecting the frescoes of the cornices and the cracks in the ceiling.

This manœuvre was accompanied by the following soliloquy, not expressed orally, though:

"So, then, you are trying to humiliate me, are you? you whom I have known when a baby, saved as I would my own child, served as I ought to serve my God, that is to say, without hope of reward! You just wait awhile — you 'll see what a man can do who once whistled the marching tune of the Huguenots in the face of M. le Cardinal himself, the *real* cardinal!"

At this moment the King turned round.

"You are there, M. d'Artagnan?" said he.

D'Artagnan saw the movement, and imitated it.

"Yes, Sire," he answered.

"Good. Oblige me by waiting until I add up this."

D'Artagnan did not reply; he merely bowed.

"Rather polite of him," he thought; "so far, I have no fault to find with him."

Louis made a violent dash with his pen, and threw it aside angrily.

"Oho!" thought the musketeer; "working yourself into a passion so as to get into the proper trim for beginning. You won't put me out at all. I did not empty the bag the other day at Blois; there is something still left in it for your benefit."

Louis rose, brushed his forehead with his hand, then abruptly stopped in front of D'Artagnan, and gazed at him with eyes that were at once imperious and kindly.

"What does he mean?" thought the musketeer; "I wish he would make an end of it, so that I may know."

"Monsieur," said the King, "you are doubtless aware that the cardinal is dead."

"I suspect as much, Sire."

"Then you are also aware that I am now master in my own house?"

"That is not a thing that dates from the death of M. le Cardinal, Sire; a man is always master of his house when he chooses to be so."

"Yes; but you remember what you said to me at Blois?"

"Ha! now we 're in for it!" thought D'Artagnan; "I was not on the wrong track. So much the better; shows my scent is tolerably keen yet."

"You do not answer," said Louis.

"Sire, I fancy I remember something of —"

"You only fancy?"

"It is so long ago —"

"If you do not remember, I do. I will tell you what you said; listen attentively."

"I am all ears, Sire; for it is not unlikely that this conversation may have a special interest for me."

Louis gave another earnest look at the musketeer, who toyed with the feather in his hat or twisted his mustache, looking quite fearless all the time.

"You left my service, monsieur, after telling me the truth, the whole truth, did you not?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Or, rather, after telling me all you believed to be the truth in regard to my thoughts and acts. That is to your credit. You began by saying that you had served my family for thirty-four years and were worn out."

"Yes, Sire, I said so."

"And you afterwards acknowledged that this weariness was a pretext, and that the real cause was because you were discontented."

"I confess that I was discontented; but, so far as I know, I never gave a sign of my discontent before any one else; and if, like an honest man, I have uttered my thoughts aloud in your Majesty's presence, no one except you has ever heard me do so."

"Make no excuses, D'Artagnan, but listen. When you made your discontent a matter of reproach to myself, you received a promise in answer; I said to you, 'Later on.' Is that true or not?"

"It is as true, Sire, as what I said to you."

"You answered: 'At once!—' Do not make excuses, I repeat. Your answer was natural; but you had no charity for your prince, M. d'Artagnan."

"Sire! charity for a King, from a poor soldier!"

"Oh, you understand me perfectly. You know well I had need of your charity; you know well I was not my own master; you know well my hopes were placed on the future. But when I spoke of that future, your answer was: 'My discharge — at once!'"

D'Artagnan bit his mustache.

"It is true," he murmured.

"You did not flatter me when I was in distress," added Louis.

"But," answered D'Artagnan, proudly raising his head, "if I did not flatter your Majesty in distress, neither have I betrayed you, either. I have shed my blood for nothing; I have watched like a dog at a door, though well knowing that no one would ever fling me a crust or a bone; and although poor likewise, I have asked for nothing but that discharge to which your Majesty has alluded."

"I know you are a man of honor; but I was a youth, and you might have spared me. What cause had you for upbraid-

ing your King? that he did not offer to assist Charles II.? or, to go a little further, that he did not marry Mademoiselle de Mancini?"

The King, while uttering the last words, had his eyes fastened on D'Artagnan with a searching look.

"Aha!" thought the musketeer, "he does more than remember, he is guessing, confound him!"

"Your decision affected the King as well as the man," continued Louis. "But, M. d'Artagnan, that weakness — you must have regarded it as a weakness?"

D'Artagnan did not answer.

"You have also reproached me with my weakness with regard to the deceased cardinal. But has not M. le Cardinal made me powerful? has he not advanced my interests, becoming powerful himself, it is true, and advancing his own interests at the same time? Still, I enjoy the benefits he has conferred on me. You would have loved and served me better, then, had I proved selfish and ungrateful?"

"Sire —"

"Let us drop the subject, monsieur; to speak of it further would occasion you too much regret and me too much pain."

D'Artagnan was not convinced; and the imperious tone which the youthful monarch had just adopted was not calculated to render the musketeer more pliant.

"You have reflected?" resumed Louis.

"Upon what, Sire?" D'Artagnan politely inquired.

"Upon what I have just been saying to you, monsieur."

"Yes, Sire, no doubt I —"

"And you have only been waiting for an opportunity to withdraw your words?"

"Sire —"

"It seems to me you hesitate."

"I do not very well understand what your Majesty has just done me the honor of saying to me."

Louis frowned.

"Please excuse me, Sire. This skull of mine is rather thick. Ideas find it hard to enter; though, when they are once lodged inside, they remain there."

"Hum! — Yet you appear to me to have a good memory."

"Almost as good as your Majesty's."

"Then give me your answer quickly. My time is valuable. How have you been employing yours since your discharge?"

"In making my fortune, Sire."

"Is not the expression somewhat rude, M. d'Artagnan?"

"I am sorry that what I say should offend your Majesty. I entertain the profoundest respect for my sovereign; and though I may be wanting in politeness, the lack of which my long sojourn in camps and barracks will, perhaps, excuse, your Majesty is far too highly placed above me to take offence at a few words that have innocently dropped from the lips of a soldier."

"The fact is, monsieur, that I am fully acquainted with the brilliant feat you performed in England. The only regret I have is that you should have broken your promise."

"I?" cried D'Artagnan.

"Decidedly. You solemnly promised me not to serve any prince after quitting my service. Now you were working for Charles II. when you abducted General Monk in that marvellous fashion."

"Pardon me, Sire, I was working for myself."

"And you have made a lucky stroke for yourself?"

"Something like what the captains of the fifteenth century used to make with their surprises and adventures."

"What do you mean by a lucky stroke? a fortune?"

"A hundred thousand crowns, Sire, — which I have in my possession; that is to say, that I gained in a week three times as much money as I had gained in the preceding fifty years."

"A good round sum, no doubt. But you are, I think, ambitious?"

"I, Sire? Why, the quarter of that sum would look like a treasure to me, and I am ready to swear that I have not the slightest desire to add to it."

"Ah! you have determined to take your ease, then?"

"Yes, Sire."

"To hang up your sword?"

"I have done so already."

"Impossible, M. d'Artagnan," said Louis, resolutely.

"But, Sire —"

"Well?"

"Why impossible?"

"Because it is not my wish!" answered the young prince in a voice so grave and imperious that D'Artagnan started with surprise, and with some uneasiness as well.

"Will your Majesty permit me to answer you in a couple of words?" he asked.

"You may speak."

"I came to this determination when I was poor and destitute."

"What follows?"

"And now, when I have an assured competence, your Majesty would rob me of my liberty, just at the very moment when I have won that which would render my liberty enjoyable."

"Who gave you leave, monsieur, to sound my intentions and canvass my purposes?" retorted Louis, in a tone that was almost wrathful. "Who told you what I shall do or what you yourself will do?"

"Sire," returned the musketeer, quietly, "I see that frankness is not to be an element in this conversation, as it was on the day we had a conversation at Blois."

"No, monsieur, everything is changed."

"I sincerely congratulate your Majesty on the fact; but—"

"You do not believe me?"

"I am not a great statesman, but I have some little perspicacity in state affairs; it does not often fail me. Now, I do not see things from quite the same point of view as your Majesty. The reign of Mazarin is over, but that of the financiers is beginning. They have the money; your Majesty will not often see much of it. To live under the paws of these hungry wolves would be rather hard on a man who had just got a glimpse of independence."

At this moment some one scratched at the door of the cabinet; the King raised his head proudly.

"Excuse me, M. d'Artagnan," said he; "it is M. Colbert who has come to report to me. Come in, M. Colbert."

D'Artagnan drew aside. Colbert entered with papers in his hand, and went up to the King.

It is unnecessary to observe that D'Artagnan did not neglect the opportunity afforded that fine, keen insight of his of scrutinizing the new face before him.

"Is the examination finished?" asked the King.

"Yes, Sire," answered Colbert.

"What is the opinion of the examiners?"

"That the accused deserve confiscation and death."

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, without the slightest change

of countenance, but looking askance at D'Artagnan; "and what is your own opinion, M. Colbert?" said he.

Colbert glanced at D'Artagnan. The face he saw troubled him, and checked the words on his lips. Louis XIV. understood the situation.

"Do not be uneasy," said he, "this is M. d'Artagnan. Do you not recognize M. d'Artagnan?"

Then the two men exchanged looks — D'Artagnan with eyes frank and sparkling; Colbert with eyes half closed and cloudy. The financier did not fancy the downright fearlessness of the soldier; the soldier was not taken with the crafty prudence of the financier.

"Indeed!" answered Colbert, "the gentleman who accomplished that brilliant feat of arms in England?"

And he made a slight bow to D'Artagnan.

"Indeed!" retorted the Gascon, "the gentleman who clipped off the lace from the uniforms of the Swiss — an economy worthy of all praise!"

And he made a profound bow to Colbert.

The financier had hoped to embarrass the musketeer; but the musketeer had impaled the financier.

"M. d'Artagnan," resumed the King, who had not remarked this by-play, every point in which would have attracted the notice of Mazarin, "this concerns the farmers of the revenue; they have robbed me; I am about to sign their death-warrants and have them hanged."

D'Artagnan started.

"Oh!" he murmured.

"You were saying?"

"Nothing, Sire; it is none of my business."

The King had already taken up a pen, and was drawing the papers toward him.

"Sire," said Colbert, in an undertone, "I warn your Majesty that, though an example is needed, there may be some difficulty in the way of the execution of the sentence."

"What do you mean?" asked Louis XIV.

"Do not believe," continued Colbert, calmly, "that you can touch the farmers without touching the superintendent. These two unhappy culprits are the bosom friends of a powerful personage, and on the day of their execution, which, however, may take place within the châtelet, there are sure to be disturbances."

Louis reddened and turned to D'Artagnan, who was quietly nibbling at his mustache, not without a smile of pity for the financier, as well as for the King, who had to spend such a length of time listening to him.

Thereupon Louis again seized the pen, and with a movement so rapid that his hand shook, he affixed his signature to the two documents presented by Colbert. Then he looked sternly at the latter, and said:

"M. Colbert, when you speak to me of state affairs, do not use the word 'difficulty' quite so often; as for the word 'impossibility,' never use it at all."

Colbert bowed, deeply humiliated at having to suffer this correction in the musketeer's presence. Then he was about to retire, but, anxious to recover his footing, he said:

"I was forgetting to inform your Majesty that the confiscations amount to the sum of five million livres."

"A neat little sum that," thought D'Artagnan.

"So that now I have in my treasury?" said the King.

"Eighteen million livres, Sire," answered Colbert, bowing.

"*Mordioux!*" muttered D'Artagnan, "that 's glorious!"

"M. Colbert," added the King, "do me the favor to cross over to the gallery where M. Lyonne is waiting and tell him to bring hither the document he has drawn up — in obedience to my orders."

"At once, Sire. Your Majesty will not need me to-night?"

"No, monsieur; adieu!"

Colbert passed out.

"And now, to come back to our business, M. d'Artagnan," resumed the King, as if nothing had happened in the meantime; "you see that, as far as regards money, there has been a notable change already."

"From naught to eighteen," replied the musketeer, gayly. "Ah! that is what your Majesty should have had the day that King Charles II. came to Blois. The two kingdoms would not be on the point of quarrelling, as they are to-day. For, if I may be allowed to say so, I see a difficulty in that direction."

"In the first place," retorted Louis, "you are ungrateful to Providence, monsieur. If it had enabled me to give a million to my brother, you would not have abandoned my service, and, consequently, would not have made your fortune — as you told me you have, just now. But this is not the only evidence of

my present well-being. I could show you another, and my quarrel with Great Britain need not alarm you —"

A valet de chambre interrupted the King, to announce M. de Lyonne.

"Enter, monsieur," said Louis. "You are punctual, and punctuality is the mark of a good servant. Let me see your letter to my brother Charles II."

D'Artagnan pricked up his ears.

"Excuse me for a moment, monsieur," said Louis to the Gascon, carelessly. "I have to forward a letter to my brother at London, informing him of my consent to the marriage of my brother, M. le Duc d'Orleans, and Lady Henrietta Stuart."

"He is pummelling me, evidently," murmured D'Artagnan, while the King was signing the letter and dismissing M. de Lyonne, "but *ma foi*, the more he pummels me, the better I like him."

The King did not take his eyes off M. de Lyonne until the door was closed behind him; he even advanced three steps, as if about to follow his minister. But, after these three steps, he stopped, paused, and came back to the musketeer.

"Now, monsieur," said he, "let us finish this affair at once. You told me some time ago at Blois that you were not rich?"

"But I am at present, Sire."

"Yes, but I have nothing to do with that. You have your own money, not mine. That does not concern me at all."

"I do not very well understand what your Majesty means."

"Then, instead of forcing me to drag the words out of you, speak freely of your own accord. What do you say to twenty thousand livres a year as a fixed income?"

"But, Sire —" answered D'Artagnan, staring at the King with wide-open eyes.

"Will four horses, equipped and kept, with whatever supplementary funds you may require for special occasions, be enough for you? Or would you prefer a fixed sum of forty thousand livres? Answer."

"Sire, your Majesty —"

"Yes, you are surprised; that is quite natural; I expected it. Come, now, answer immediately, or I shall believe you have lost that quickness of decision which I have always noticed in you."

"Certainly twenty thousand livres a year is a large sum; but —"

"No buts. Yes or no. Do you consider it a fair remuneration?"

"Oh! certainly —"

"Then you are satisfied with it? Well, so am I. After all, it will be better to consider the incidental expenses separately; you will settle that with Colbert. Now let us pass to something more important."

"But, Sire, I have told your Majesty —"

"That you wished to take your ease, I know it. But I told you that I did not wish it — I am the master, I imagine?"

"Yes, Sire."

"You see it at last! You were formerly expecting to become captain of the musketeers?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Good. This is your commission signed. I shall place it in this drawer. On the day you return from a certain expedition upon which I purpose sending you, it is yours; you will take it from the drawer yourself."

D'Artagnan still hesitated and hung his head.

"Come, come, monsieur," said the King, "one would think, to look at you, you did not know that the captain-general of the musketeers has precedence at the court of the Most Christian King over the marshals of France?"

"I know that, Sire."

"Then one would say you did not trust my word?"

"Oh! Sire, never. Do not believe such a thing as that."

"I wanted to prove to you that, although you are so good a servant, you had lost a good master. Do you think I am the sort of master that suits you?"

"I am beginning to think you are, Sire."

"Then, monsieur, you will at once resume your functions. Your company has been entirely demoralized since your departure, and the men spend their time haunting taverns and fighting duels, in contempt of my edicts and those of my father. You must reorganize the service as speedily as possible."

"Yes, Sire."

"You will not again quit my person."

"Very well, Sire."

"You will march with me to the army and pitch your camp around my tent."

"Then, Sire, if that is the kind of service you are going to

impose upon me," answered D'Artagnan, "there is no reason why your Majesty should give me twenty thousand livres, since I cannot earn them."

"I wish you to be able to keep open house, to entertain magnificently; I wish my captain of musketeers to be a person of distinction."

"And I don't wish for money that is so easily found," said D'Artagnan, bluntly. "I wish for money that I have earned. The post your Majesty is giving me is a sinecure which the first-comer would fill for four thousand livres."

Louis XIV. laughed.

"What a cunning Gascon you are, M. d'Artagnan! You are determined to wrest from me the secret of my heart."

"But has your Majesty a secret?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Oh, in that case, I accept the twenty thousand livres, for I am sure to keep the secret, and discretion is worth its weight in gold, considering the times we 're living in."

"You will put on your riding boots, M. d'Artagnan, and take horse."

"At once?"

"Within two days."

"I am glad of that, Sire, for I have some matters to settle before starting, particularly if there is a chance of fighting."

"And there may be."

"I shall not be sorry for it. But, Sire, though you have appealed to the avarice, the ambition, and the heart of M. d'Artagnan, you have forgotten one thing."

"What is it?"

"You have not appealed to his vanity. When am I to be a knight of the King's orders?"

"Does that trouble you?"

"Why, yes, my friend Athos is all bedizened with them. I am almost blinded when I look at him."

"You will be a knight of my orders a month after you have taken out your commission as captain."

"Ah!" murmured the officer, pensively, "after the expedition?"

"Precisely."

"Where is your Majesty sending me?"

"Are you acquainted with Bretagne?"

"No, Sire."

"Any friends there?"

"In Bretagne? *Ma foi*, no!"

"So much the better. Have you a knowledge of fortification?"

D'Artagnan smiled.

"I think so, Sire."

"That means you can distinguish between a fortress and an ordinary fortification such as we permit those of our vassals who are castellans to possess?"

"I can distinguish between a fort and a rampart, just as I can distinguish between a cuirass and a pie-crust, Sire. Will that do?"

"Yes."

"Do I go alone?"

"Absolutely alone; without even a lackey."

"May I venture to ask your Majesty why?"

"Because, monsieur, you will sometimes, perhaps, be obliged to assume the disguise of a servant belonging to a good family. Your face is very well known throughout France, M. d'Artagnan."

"And what next, Sire?"

"You will make a tour through Bretagne and examine carefully the fortifications of that country."

"And the coasts also?"

"Yes; and the islands as well."

"Ah!"

"You will begin with Belle-Isle-en-Mer."

"Which belongs to M. Fouquet?" said D'Artagnan, gravely, fixing his keen eyes on the King's face.

"I think you are right, monsieur. Yes, Belle-Isle does belong to M. Fouquet."

"Then your Majesty wishes to discover whether Belle-Isle is a strong fortress?"

"Yes."

"And if the fortifications are new or old?"

"Exactly."

"And whether M. le Surintendant's vassals are numerous enough to garrison it?"

"The very thing I want to learn, monsieur; you have laid your finger on the question."

"And if no fortifications are being raised, Sire?"

"You will travel about Bretagne; keep your ears open and judge for yourself."

D'Artagnan scratched his mustache.

"Am I to be the King's spy?" he asked bluffly.

"No, monsieur."

"Excuse me, Sire, it looks as if I were going to spy on your Majesty's behalf."

"You are going on an expedition of discovery, monsieur. Supposing you were marching, sword in hand, at the head of your musketeers to reconnoitre some place or other, or some position of the enemy —"

The last word made D'Artagnan start.

"Would you, in such a case, believe yourself to be a spy?"

"No, no!" said D'Artagnan, pensively; "the thing assumes a different complexion when you are reconnoitring an enemy — a soldier is a soldier. And if Belle-Isle is being fortified, Sire?"

"You will take a plan of the fortifications."

"But will they let me in?"

"That's your look-out, it does not concern me. Did you not hear me say I appropriated twenty thousand livres a year for your necessary expenses?"

"Undoubtedly, Sire. And if Belle-Isle is not being fortified?"

"Return quietly; you need not fatigue your horse then."

"Sire, I am ready."

"You will begin to-morrow by calling on M. le Surintendant for the first quarter of the pension I have allowed you. Are you acquainted with M. Fouquet?"

"Hardly, Sire; but your Majesty will permit me to remark that it is just as well I should not be acquainted with him."

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, it is not; for he will refuse you the money I wish you to have, and this refusal is what I am waiting for."

"Ah!" murmured D'Artagnan. "And what am I to do then?"

"As soon as you are refused you will go to M. Colbert for it. By the way, have you a good horse?"

"An excellent one, Sire."

"What did you pay for it?"

"A hundred and fifty pistoles."

"I will buy it. Here is a note for two hundred pistoles."

"But I must have a horse for the journey, Sire?"

"Well, what then?"

"What then? You are taking mine away from me!"

"By no means. On the contrary, I let you have mine. Only, as he is now mine and not yours, I am pretty sure you will not spare him."

"Then your Majesty is in a hurry?"

"Very much so."

"Then why should I wait two days?"

"For two reasons known to myself."

"That is another matter. The horse can make up for these two days during the week he is on the road; and then, there is the post."

"No, no, the post is compromising enough already, M. d'Artagnan. Go now, and do not forget you belong to me."

"Sire, it was not I who forgot it before! At what o'clock shall I take leave of your Majesty, the day after to-morrow?"

"Where are you staying?"

"I suppose now I must stay in the Louvre."

"Not at present. Keep your lodgings in the city, I will pay for them. You will start during the night, for no one must see you leaving, or should any one see you it must not be supposed you are in my service. Keep your lips sealed, M. d'Artagnan."

"The last four words destroy the pleasure I derived from everything else your Majesty said."

"I asked you where you were staying. I cannot always be sending to M. le Comte de la Fère's for you."

"With M. Planchet, a grocer in the Rue des Lombards, sign of the *Pilon d'Or*."

"Go out but little, show yourself still less, and wait for my orders."

"Still, I must go for the money, Sire."

"True; though you will meet so many people going to the superintendent's office, you cannot help mixing with the crowd."

"I cannot get the money without the notes, Sire."

"Here they are."

The King signed them.

D'Artagnan scrutinized them closely to see that everything was in order.

"This is money," he explained, "and money has to be either read or counted."

"Adieu, M. d'Artagnan," said the King, "I think you have understood me perfectly."

"Oh, all I understood is that your Majesty is sending me to Belle-Isle."

"To find out?"

"To find out how the works of M. Fouquet are getting along; that is all."

"Good. You stand a chance of being caught."

"I stand a chance of no such thing," answered D'Artagnan, boldly.

"You stand a chance of being slain," continued the King.

"Not at all probable, Sire."

"In the first case, you must not speak; in the second, let no paper be found on you that could speak."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders cavalierly, and, after taking leave of the King, muttered:

"This is a continuation of the English shower; I must contrive to keep under the spout."

CHAPTER LIV.

M. FOUQUET'S HOUSES.

While D'Artagnan was directing his steps to Planchet's, his head racked and dazed by all that had just happened to him, a scene of an altogether different kind — yet not unconnected with the conversation between the musketeer and the King — was being enacted elsewhere. Indeed, this scene was taking place entirely away from Paris, in a house in the village of Saint-Mandé, owned by Fouquet, the superintendent.

The minister had just arrived at this summer residence of his, followed by his chief clerk, who carried an enormous portfolio stuffed with papers to be examined or to be signed.

It was now about five in the afternoon, and the masters had dined; but supper was being got ready for twenty inferior guests.

The superintendent did not pause for a moment, but, with a single bound, cleared the threshold, ran across the apartments, and reached his cabinet. He declared his intention of locking himself in for the purpose of working, and directed that he

should not be disturbed by anybody or anything, except there came an express order from the King.

So soon as Fouquet had shut himself up, two footmen were stationed as sentinels in front of the door. Then Fouquet pushed a bolt which displaced a panel that walled up the entrance and prevented everything that occurred in the room from being seen or heard. It was something very unusual for Fouquet to lock himself in merely for the sake of being locked in, but he did so on the present occasion. Next, he made straight for his bureau, sat down before it, opened the portfolio, and began selecting certain documents from the enormous mass of papers it contained.

It was not more than ten minutes after he had entered and taken all the precautions we have mentioned, when the repeated sounds of several little rhythmical strokes smote upon his ear and, apparently, distracted his attention. Fouquet raised his head, strained his ear and listened.

The little strokes continued. Then the hard-working financier rose somewhat impatiently, and walked up to a mirror from behind which came the blows, struck either by a hand or by some invisible mechanism.

The mirror was a large one and set into the panel. Three others, exactly like it, gave a certain air of symmetry to the apartment. They were in no respect different from the one before which he stood.

Undoubtedly these little reiterated strokes were intended as a signal; for the moment Fouquet drew near the glass and listened they were renewed.

"Oho!" murmured the superintendent; "who can it be? I did not expect any one to-day."

And, evidently in response to the signal, he pulled at a gilt nail in the frame of the mirror, and shook it three times.

Thereupon he returned to his seat.

"*Ma foi*, they can wait," said he.

He dived into the ocean of papers spread out before him, and again became absorbed in his work. With incredible quickness and marvellous lucidity, Fouquet deciphered the longest documents, the most complicated writings, correcting and annotating them with a pen that moved as if it were in a fever. The work melted between his fingers. Signatures, figures, references multiplied as if ten clerks with ten brains and a hundred fingers were engaged on a task for which

five fingers and a great intellect showed themselves fully competent.

Fouquet never interrupted his labors except to cast a furtive look, now and then, at a clock in front of him.

He did so because he worked according to system, worked during a certain hour, and during this hour accomplished more than another man could have done in a day. Consequently, he was always sure, unless he was disturbed, to get through his labors at the exact period which his irresistible energy had fixed as their limit. But in the midst of his ardent toil, the clear strokes on the little bell behind the mirror sounded once more; and this time they were more hurried and urgent.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Fouquet; "the lady is evidently getting impatient. Let me see — it must be the countess; but, no, the countess is at Rambouillet and will be there for the next three days. Ah, the president's wife! No, Madame la Présidente would not ring so authoritatively; she would do so with more humility, and, after that, wait until it was my good pleasure to receive her. It is plain enough that, though I know who she is n't, I cannot for the life of me tell who she is. And since it is not you, marquise, cannot, in fact, be you, a fig for any one else!"

And although the bell was struck again and again, he never moved. But after a quarter of an hour Fouquet became impatient also, and the rest of his task was completed with lightning speed. Then he thrust the papers back into the portfolio, and after giving a quick glance at his looking-glass, while the little strokes were becoming now more rapid and urgent than ever:

"Who the mischief," he cried, "is making all that noise? Has anything happened? Who can the Ariadne be who is so eager to see me?"

Thereupon he pressed with the tip of his finger a nail parallel to the one he had pulled out before. Immediately the mirror moved aside like the fold of a door and revealed a deep little closet, in which the superintendent was quickly lost, shut up, as it were, in a large box. There he touched another spring, when a block of the wall moved aside; he passed through the opening and the block closed on him of itself.

Fouquet next descended a winding staircase with a score of steps that ran underground, and came to a long, subterranean

passage, paved with flagstones and lit by concealed loop-holes. The walls of this vault were lined with tiles, and the floor was carpeted.

The underground passage ran even under the street which separated the Fouquet mansion from the Parc de Vincennes. At the end of it was a winding staircase parallel to the one by which the superintendent had descended. He went up this second staircase, pressed a spring, entered a closet like the one near his cabinet and passed through it into a chamber that was absolutely empty, although furnished with the utmost elegance.

When he was inside, he looked carefully to see if the mirror had closed tightly behind him, and evidently satisfied that it had, he unlocked a trebly-barred door in front of him with a little silver-gilt key. The door led into a handsome cabinet, sumptuously furnished, in which an exquisitely beautiful lady was sitting upon cushions. As soon as the superintendent appeared, she rose and ran to meet him.

"Great heavens!" cried he, starting back in amazement, "Madame la Marquise de Bellières! you here?"

"Yes, monsieur," murmured the marquise, "yes, it is I."

"My dear marquise!" exclaimed Fouquet, making ready to fall at her feet. "Great God! what way did you come? And I to keep you waiting!"

"You have kept me waiting a very long time indeed, monsieur."

"I ought to feel happy, marquise, at the thought that you felt the time long."

"It seemed an eternity, monsieur. Why, I rang more than a score of times! Did you not hear?"

"How pale you look, marquise! you are trembling."

"Did you not hear, then, when I summoned you?"

"Oh, I heard the bell distinctly, madame; but I could not come. How was I to suppose it was you, after you had repulsed me so cruelly? Had I had the slightest suspicion of the happiness that awaited me, you may feel assured I should have left everything and run to fall at your feet, as I am doing now."

The marquise looked round the apartment.

"Are we quite alone, monsieur?" she inquired.

"Yes, madame, I can stake my life on that."

"Yes, yes, I see we are," said the marquise, sadly.

"You sigh?"

"What mysteries, what precautions!" she retorted with some bitterness. "It is easy to see you are afraid lest your amours may be suspected!"

"Would you prefer that I should make them public?"

"Oh, no; I regard you as a person of great delicacy," she answered, with a smile.

"Come, now, marquise, no reproaches, I entreat."

"Reproaches? What right have I to reproach you?"

"Unfortunately, you have none. But tell me — you whom I have loved for a year without return and without hope —"

"You are mistaken. Without hope, yes; without return, no."

"Ah! according to my idea there is only one proof of real love, and that proof I am still waiting for."

"I bring it with me, monsieur."

Fouquet attempted to fold her in his arms, but she freed herself with a gesture.

"You seem determined, monsieur, to misunderstand me always and to refuse to accept the sole thing which it is in my power to give you — my devotion."

"Ah! you do not love me, then; devotion is only a virtue, love is a passion."

"Hear me, monsieur, I beseech you. Surely you must understand that nothing but a very serious motive could have brought me hither?"

"Oh, the motive is nothing to me, so long as you are here, and I can speak to you and look at you."

"Yes, you are right; the main point is that I am here, without the knowledge of any one, and that I can speak to you."

Fouquet sank on his knees.

"Speak, madame, speak," said he, "I am eager to hear you."

The marquise gazed at him with a singular expression of mingled sadness and affection.

"Oh!" she murmured at last, "would that I were she who has the right to see you every moment, to speak to you every instant! Would that I were able to watch over you, not needing to touch mysterious springs when I desire your presence, not expecting to see the man I love appear suddenly

before me like a phantom, and then vanish into the darkness of a mystery more strange than even that which heralded his coming! Oh! were I such a woman I should be very happy."

"Why, marquise," said Fouquet, smiling, "it looks as though you were speaking of my wife!"

"Yes, it is certainly of her I am speaking."

"Then, marquise, you need not envy her lot. Among all the women with whom I am acquainted, Madame Fouquet is the one who sees me least, speaks to me least, and has the least share of my society."

"Still, monsieur, she is not compelled to press her hand on an ornament behind a mirror when she desires your company, nor does she receive an answer in the form of a mysterious, frightful sound made by a bell which has been set a-going by some incomprehensible agency, nor have you ever forbidden her to search for the secret of these communications, threatening her with the severance of all your relations if she is too curious, as you have done in the case of women who have been here before me and may be here after me."

"Ah! my dear marquise, how unjust you are! How little you are aware of what you are doing when you protest against mystery! Without mystery there is no untroubled love, and when love is troubled it cannot be happy. But let us come back to ourselves, to that devotion of which you have been speaking; or rather, leave me to my illusions, marquise; let me believe that that devotion is really love."

"A while ago," continued the marquise, passing over her eyes a hand a Greek sculptor would have delighted to model, "a while ago I should have found no difficulty in talking; my ideas were clear, were vigorous; now I am confused, am agitated, I tremble. I am afraid the news I bring you is very bad."

"If this bad news has led you hither, marquise, then it is welcome; or rather, marquise, now that you are here, now that you have confessed I am not indifferent to you, let us lay aside the bad news and talk of yourself."

"No, no; on the contrary, force me to tell it to you; insist on the disclosure of it this very instant; insist that no sentimental considerations shall stand in the way of it. Fouquet, my friend, this news is of transcendent importance."

"You astonish me, marquise; nay, more, you almost alarm me; you are so serious-minded and circumspect, and know so

well the society in which we both move. Is the matter, then, so grave?"

"Grave indeed! Listen."

"But in the first place, how did you come here?"

"You will learn that afterward; let us first deal with the most important point of all."

"Continue, marquise, I implore you; have mercy on my impatience."

"Are you aware that M. Colbert has been appointed intendant of finance?"

"Nonsense! Colbert, little Colbert?"

"Yes, Colbert, little Colbert."

"Mazarin's man-of-all-work?"

"Precisely."

"Well, what is there so terrible in all that, marquise? Though — little Colbert intendant! Astonishing, I admit, but nothing to be frightened about."

"Do you believe the King had no weighty reasons for conferring such a post on the man you have been in the habit of styling the little clodhopper?"

"But are you quite sure the King has done so?"

"So it is said."

"Said by whom?"

"By everybody."

"Everybody is nobody. Do you know of any well-informed person who says it?"

"Madame Vanel."

"Ah, you have frightened me at last," said Fouquet, laughing. "In fact, if any one should be well informed, it is the person you mention."

"Do not speak slightingly of poor Marguerite, M. Fouquet, for she still loves you."

"You don't say so? It really passes belief! I had imagined that little Colbert, as you called him just now, had erased that love of hers and put a daub of ink or a layer of filth in its place."

"Fouquet, Fouquet, is it thus you treat the women you abandon?"

"Oh, now, marquise, you are not really going to undertake the defence of Madame Vanel?"

"Yes, I am; for I repeat it, she still loves you, and the proof of it is that she wishes to save you."

"By your interposition, marquise. Rather adroit of her. No other angel could please me as well or be as successful in leading me to salvation. But are you acquainted with Marguerite?"

"She was my friend at the convent."

"And you tell me she informed you that M. Colbert has been appointed intendant?"

"Yes."

"Then make this clear to me, marquise. Suppose M. Colbert is intendant. In that case he is my subordinate, my clerk. How can such a person either injure or annoy me?"

"Apparently you do not reflect, monsieur," answered the marquise.

"Reflect on what?"

"On the fact that M. Colbert hates you."

"Hates me! why, heavens above us, marquise, where have you been living? Don't you know that every one hates me, and he, of course, with the rest?"

"But more than the rest."

"I suppose so; let him."

"He is ambitious."

"Who is not?"

"Yes; but his ambition has no bounds."

"I can easily see that, since he took such pains to succeed me in Madame Vanel's favor."

"And he did succeed you. Beware of him."

"Do you mean that he has the impudence to think of becoming superintendent in my place?"

"You have never feared that he might have?"

"Oh," returned Fouquet, "to succeed me in the favor of Madame Vanel is one thing, to succeed me in the favor of the King is another. It is not so easy to buy the King of France as it is to purchase the wife of a *maître des comptes*."

"Why, monsieur, everything can be purchased, either with gold or by intriguing."

"Madame, you know differently, you to whom I have offered millions."

"You should have offered me, instead of your millions, a genuine, sincere, and single-hearted love; I might have accepted it. So you see that, in a certain sense, everything can be bought, if not in one way, then in another."

"Then, in your opinion, M. Colbert is thinking of asking the

price of my post of superintendent? Don't be uneasy, marquise; he has n't money enough to pay for it."

"But if he steal it from you?"

"Oh, that 's quite a different thing. Unluckily for him, before carrying the fortress he must either demolish the outworks or make a breach in them; now I am devilishly well fortified, I can tell you, marquise."

"By your outworks I presume you mean your creatures, your friends?"

"Decidedly."

"Is M. d'Eymeris one of your creatures?"

"Yes."

"And M. Lyodot one of your friends?"

"Certainly."

"And M. de Vanin?"

"Oh, they can do what they like with him, but —"

"But?"

"Let them not dare to meddle with the others."

"Then, if you do not want to have them meddle with M. d'Eymeris and M. Lyodot, it is time for you to look to it!"

"Who threatens them?"

"Will you listen to me now?"

"With the profoundest attention, marquise."

"And not interrupt me?"

"Speak."

"Well, Marguerite sent for me this morning."

"Ah!"

"Yes."

"And what did she want with you?"

"'I do not dare,' said she, 'to call on M. Fouquet myself.'"

"Pshaw! why should n't she? Did she think I should have upbraided her? Goodness! how the poor woman is mistaken!"

"'Do you see him, and tell him he must be on his guard against M. de Colbert.'"

"What! warning me to be on my guard against her lover?"

"I told you she still loves you."

"What comes next, marquise?"

"'M. de Colbert,' she added, 'came two days ago to inform me that he had been appointed intendant.'"

"I said to you before, marquise, that M. *de* Colbert will be more in my power than ever if he has been made intendant."

"Yes, but that is not all: Marguerite, as you are aware, is an intimate friend of Madame d'Eymeris and Madame Lyodot."

"Yes."

"Well, M. de Colbert asked her many searching questions as to the fortunes of their husbands and the extent of their devotion to you."

"Oh, as to these two gentlemen, I can answer for them: they will be devoted to me so long as they have a breath of life."

"Then a visitor was announced, and Madame Vanel had to leave M. Colbert for a few moments. Now you know M. Colbert never wastes his time. When the new intendant was alone, he took a pencil from his pocket, and, as there was some paper on the table, he began to jot down notes."

"Notes on D'Eymeris and Lyodot?"

"Exactly."

"I should be curious to know their nature."

"I have brought them to you."

"Eh? Madame Vanel laid her hands on Colbert's notes and sent them to me?"

"No, but by a chance that looks like a miracle, she got hold of the duplicates."

"How did she manage it?

"Listen. I told you Colbert found paper on the table?"

"Yes."

"And took a pencil from his pocket?"

"Yes."

"And wrote on the paper?"

"Yes."

"The pencil was a lead-pencil; consequently it was hard; the marking on the first sheet was black; that on the one under it white."

"And what happened?"

"He tore off the first sheet, and never thought of the second."

"Well?"

"Well, what he had written on the first sheet could be read on the second. Madame Vanel read it, and at once sent for me."

"Ah!"

"Then, when she felt assured that I was devoted to you, she gave me the paper and told me all the secrets of this house of yours."

"And this paper?" asked Fouquet, becoming somewhat agitated.

"Here it is, monsieur," said the marquise; "read it."

Fouquet read:

"'*Names of the farmers of the revenue to be condemned by the Chamber of Justice: D'Eymeris, a friend of M. F.; Lyodot, a friend of M. F.; De Vanin, indif.*'

"D'Eymeris! Lyodot!" cried Fouquet, reading the note again.

"Friends of M. F.," said the marquise, pointing at them with her finger.

"But what is the meaning of these words: 'To be condemned by the Chamber of Justice'?"

"Upon my word, they seem plain enough to me. But you have not finished. Read on."

Fouquet continued:

"'*The two first to death, the third to dismissal, along with MM. d'Hautemont and De la Valette, whose estates will be confiscated.*'

"Good God!" cried Fouquet, "D'Eymeris and Lyodot to death! to death! But though the Chamber of Justice may condemn them to death, the King will never ratify the sentence, and they cannot be executed without the signature of the King."

"The King has made M. Colbert intendant."

"Oh!" exclaimed Fouquet, feeling as if an abyss had just opened at his feet, "impossible! impossible! But some one has passed a pencil over the marks left by Colbert's?"

"It was I. I was afraid the first tracing might rub out."

"Oh! I shall learn everything!"

"You will learn nothing, monsieur. You despise your enemies too much to succeed in doing so."

"Oh, excuse me, my dear marquise. Of course I believe M. Colbert to be my enemy, and I acknowledge that he is a man to be feared. But I have plenty of time to deal with him, and since you are here, since you have assured me of your devotion, and given me a hint that you love me; in a word, since we are alone —"

"I came to save you, M. Fouquet, and not to ruin myself," said the marquise, rising; "be warned, then —"

"In good truth, marquise, you are far too much alarmed, and unless your alarm is genuine —"

"This M. Colbert has a Machiavellian heart! Be on your guard!"

"And what have I?" inquired Fouquet, also rising.

"You? Oh, you have simply a noble heart. Be on your guard!"

"And therefore?"

"And therefore, my friend, I have done what I felt it my duty to do, although I risked my reputation. Adieu."

"No, not adieu, *au revoir!*"

"Perhaps," said the marquise.

And after giving her hand to Fouquet to kiss, she marched resolutely to the door, the superintendent not venturing to bar her passage.

As for Fouquet, with head bowed down and a face clouded with care, he returned by the subterranean path along which ran the metal wires that communicated with the two houses, transmitting through two mirrors the desires and appeals of two correspondents.

CHAPTER LV.

THE ABBÉ FOUQUET.

Fouquet hurried back to his apartments through the underground passage and closed the mirror behind him. Just when he had entered his cabinet there was a loud knocking at the door, and a well-known voice shouted:

"Open, monsieur, open, I beseech you."

Fouquet rapidly put everything in as good order as he was able, so that his absence and excitement might not be noticed; he scattered papers over his desk, took up a pen, and inquired through the door, for the purpose of gaining time:

"Who are you?"

"What! do you not recognize me, monsieur?" the voice answered.

"I should think I did, my friend," muttered Fouquet in an aside, "I recognize you perfectly."

Then aloud:

"It's Gourville, is it not?"

"Why, yes, monsieur."

Fouquet rose, gave a last look at the glass, went to the door, and drew the bolt. Gourville entered.

"Ah, monseigneur, monseigneur, how could you be so cruel!"

"In what way?"

"I have been entreating you for the last quarter of an hour to let me in, and you never even answered."

"Now once for all, let me tell you I don't care to be disturbed when I 'm working; and although I may make you an exception, I wish my orders to be respected by others."

"Monseigneur, as matters are now I would have shattered, broken to pieces, overturned orders, and walls, and bolts, and bars to get at you."

"Ah! something has happened?"

"I warrant you there has, monseigneur."

"What is it?" asked Fouquet, somewhat disturbed by the evident agitation of his most trusted confidant.

"A secret Chamber of Justice has been constituted, monseigneur."

"I am well aware of that. But has it met, Gourville?"

"It has not only met, but it has passed sentence —"

"Passed sentence!" repeated the superintendent, turning pale, and with a shudder he could not repress, "passed sentence. Sentence on whom?"

"On two of your friends."

"Lyodot and D'Eymeris?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"But sentence of what?"

"Sentence of death."

"Actually passed sentence of death! Oh! you are mistaken, Gourville, it is not possible."

"Here is the copy of the sentence. The King will sign it to-day, if he has not done so already."

Fouquet eagerly seized the paper, read it, and handed it back to Gourville.

"The King will not sign it," said he.

Gourville shook his head.

"Do not be so sure of that, monseigneur; M. Colbert is a bold adviser."

"Colbert again!" cried Fouquet. "Why does that name torture my ears at every turn for the last two or three days? You are giving far too much importance, Gourville, to so

trivial a person. Let Colbert appear, I will face him; let him lift his head, and I will crush him. But you understand very well I must have something palpable before me if I am to face it, must have a surface upon which I can plant my foot if I am to trample on it."

"Have patience, monseigneur; you do not know what an able man Colbert is. Study him, and study him at once. This dark financier resembles one of those meteors which the eye sees only dimly before its fatal sweep downward; when it is felt, death is at hand."

"Gourville, you really go too far," said Fouquet, smiling. "Do not be offended, my friend, if I am not so easily frightened as you seem to imagine. Colbert a meteor! — Then, *corbleu!* we 'll find out something about this meteor. Come, now, I want acts, not words. What has he been doing?"

"He has ordered the Paris executioner to construct two gibbets," answered Gourville, quietly.

Fouquet raised his head; there was a glare in his eyes.

"Are you sure of what you are saying?" he cried.

"This proves it, monseigneur."

And Gourville handed him a note sent by one of the secretaries of the Hôtel de Ville who was a creature of Fouquet.

"Yes, it is true," murmured the minister, "they are building the scaffold. But the King has not signed the sentence, Gourville, the King will not sign it."

"I can soon find that out," answered Gourville.

"How?"

"If the King has signed it, the gibbets will be brought to the Hôtel de Ville to-night, so that they may be ready for their work to-morrow morning."

"No, no, no!" cried Fouquet again. "You are all deceived, and are trying to deceive me also. Why, only two days ago I had a visit from Lyodot, and only three days ago poor D'Eymeris sent me a present of some Syracuse wine!"

"What does that prove?" answered Gourville, "except that the Chamber of Justice met secretly, deliberated in the absence of the accused, and that the entire trial was over before they were arrested."

"Then they have been arrested?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But where, when, how?"

"Lyodot yesterday at daybreak; D'Eymeris at nightfall

the day before, when returning from the house of his mistress. Their disappearance did not excite any attention until Colbert raised the mask suddenly and made the thing public. They are at this very moment proclaiming it by sound of trumpet through the streets of Paris; and in fact, monseigneur, you would seem to be nearly the only person who is ignorant of the matter."

Fouquet began striding up and down the room, his anxiety becoming more and more painful.

"What do you intend doing, monseigneur?" asked Gourville.

"If things are as you say, I will go to the Louvre," cried the superintendent. "But I will first call at the Hôtel de Ville. If I find the sentence has been signed, we 'll see."

Gourville shrugged his shoulders.

"Incredulity," he exclaimed, "thou art the plague of all great minds!"

"Gourville!"

"Yes," he continued, "and thou ruinest them in a moment, just as in a moment contagion destroys the most vigorous constitutions."

"Let us start," cried Fouquet. "Order the door to be opened, Gourville."

"Be careful," answered his friend. "M. l'Abbé Fouquet is there."

"Ah! my brother," returned the superintendent, in a tone of annoyance, "he is there, is he? Then he has heard some bad news which he takes a delight in bringing me, according to his custom. *Diable!* if my brother is there, Gourville, matters must be going on badly. Why did you not tell me so before? I should have believed you more readily if you had done so."

"Oh, monseigneur, do not slander your brother," said Gourville, laughing. "His visit has no evil purpose, I assure you."

"So you would speak in favor of that heartless, hairbrained spendthrift?"

"He knows you are rich."

"He wishes for my ruin."

"No; he wishes for your purse, that is all."

"No more of that. A hundred thousand crowns a month from me during the last two years! You doubt it? *Corbleu!*

I ought to know, I had to pay the money and I am pretty good at figures."

Gourville chuckled slyly.

"Oh, I know what you 're thinking," continued the superintendent; "it was the King who really paid. A poor joke, Gourville, and this is not a time for joking."

"Don't get angry, monseigneur."

"Well, let it pass. But let some one tell the abbé to go away. I have not a sou."

Gourville was about to step to the door.

"He has n't been near me for a month," Fouquet went on, "why could n't he have stayed away for two?"

"Because he repents keeping bad company and prefers yours to that of his bravoes."

"Thanks for the compliment. You are turning into a queer sort of advocate, Gourville; you are not very particular if you are willing to become the advocate of the Abbé Fouquet!"

"Oh, every man has his good points; yes, and his useful points, monseigneur."

"Can the bravoes my brother hires and makes drunk be of any earthly use to anybody? Prove that, if you are able."

"A time may come, monseigneur, when you will consider yourself very lucky to have these rascals near at hand."

"So you would have me make friends with M. l'Abbé?" inquired Fouquet, ironically.

"I would have you avoid quarrelling with a hundred, or a hundred and twenty, desperadoes, who, by holding their rapiers point to point and hilt to hilt, could form a cordon of steel capable of surrounding three thousand men."

Fouquet flashed a keen glance at Gourville, and, passing in front of him, said:

"You are right." Then turning to the footman in attendance, he added: "Show M. l'Abbé Fouquet in."

Two minutes afterwards the abbé stood upon the threshold, making the most profound salutations.

He was between forty and forty-five years old, half churchman and half soldier, half bully and half priest. Any one who saw him felt that, even though he had no sword by his side, he had pistols stowed away about him somewhere.

Fouquet bowed to him with the air of a minister rather than with that of an elder brother.

"What is your business with me, M. l'Abbé?" said he.

"Oh! to speak to me in such a tone as that, brother!"

"I speak to you in that tone, monsieur, because I am in a great hurry."

The abbé looked slyly at Gourville and uneasily at his brother.

"I have to pay three hundred pistoles to M. de Bregi to-night. A debt contracted at play, and, therefore, a debt of honor, brother."

"Nothing more?" asked Fouquet, who knew his brother would never have disturbed him for such a trifle as that.

"A thousand to my butcher, who will send in no more supplies."

"Nothing more?"

"Twelve hundred to my tailor," continued the abbé. "The rascal has actually forced me to send back seven suits he had made for my servants. The result is my liveries look so shabby that my mistress is talking of taking one of the revenue farmers in my place, and that would be a humiliation for the Church."

"Anything else?" said Fouquet.

"You must have remarked, monsieur," continued the abbé, humbly, "that I have asked nothing for myself."

"Your delicacy is something wonderful, monsieur," replied Fouquet; "so you see I am waiting until you do —"

The minister paused for a moment.

"Twelve hundred pistoles to a tailor!" said he. "Is not that a rather large sum to be spent on clothes?"

"I have a hundred men in my service," answered the abbé, loftily. "It takes something to maintain them, I fancy."

"A hundred men!" exclaimed Fouquet. "Are you a Richelieu or a Mazarin that you require to be guarded by a hundred men? What use are these hundred men to you? Tell me."

"And it is you who ask me such a question as that?" rejoined the abbé. "Ask me why I keep a hundred men? Ah! how can you have the heart to do it?"

"Yes, I ask you such a question as that. What can you want with a hundred men? Answer."

"Ah! to have a thankless brother!" continued the abbé, moved almost to tears.

"Explain yourself."

"Why, monsieur, if I thought only of myself, a single valet would satisfy all my wants. Nay, if I did not think of others, I should not need any servant at all. But you, you who have so many enemies — why, a hundred men are not sufficient for

your defence! A hundred men! — you would need ten thousand. If I maintain a hundred men, I do so to prevent any one from daring to raise his voice against you among the crowds that haunt the public places of the city. But for me, monsieur, you would be overwhelmed with imprecations, you would be abused like a pickpocket, you could not last a week, no, not a single week, monsieur. Now do you understand?"

"I was not aware that I had such a doughty champion, M. l'Abbé."

"He doubts my word! Well, hear what happened lately. Yesterday a man was bargaining about the price of a hen in the Rue de la Huchette — "

"I don't see how that could do me any harm, M. l'Abbé."

"But it could. The hen was not fat. The purchaser refused to pay eighteen sous for it. He said he could not afford to give eighteen sous for the skin of a hen out of which M. Fouquet had managed to get all the fat."

"What happened then?"

"Every one laughed," continued the abbé, "laughed at your expense, *mort de tous les diables!* and the rabble crowded round the buffoon, who added: 'Give me a hen fed by M. Colbert, and I'll pay you whatever you ask.' At once there was a general clapping of hands. A hideous insult! an insult scandalous enough to force a brother to veil his face in shame."

Fouquet reddened.

"And so you veiled yours, monsieur?" said the superintendent.

"No, for I had stationed one of my men among the crowd," the abbé went on; "a new recruit fresh from the province, a certain M. de Menneville to whom I have become very much attached. He forced his way up to the joker, crying —

"'*Mille barbes!* I'll have a cut at you, Master Pickle-herring, you Colbert rascal!'

"'And I'll soon make mincemeat of you, you Fouquet villain!' the wag retorted. Then they fell to in front of the pastry cook's, a hedge of curious spectators around them, and five hundred more at the windows."

"How did it end?" asked Fouquet.

"End, monsieur? Why, my Menneville spitted him, the gaping crowd looking on in amazement, and then said to the pastry cook: 'You can have this turkey, my friend; he is fatter than your hen.'

"And now you know how I spend my income," cried the abbé, triumphantly; "I spend it in supporting the honor of the family, monsieur."

Fouquet hung his head.

"And I have a hundred fellows as good as Menneville," continued the abbé.

"You must feel proud," said Fouquet. "Well, hand in your account to Gourville and remain here to-night."

"Will there be a supper?"

"Oh, yes, there will be a supper."

"But is not the cashier's office closed?"

"Gourville will open it for you. Leave me, M. l'Abbé, leave me."

The abbé bowed to the ground.

"We are friends, then, are we not?" said he.

"Yes, friends. Come here, Gourville."

"Are you going out? Then you won't be at supper?"

"I'll return in an hour. Do not be uneasy about your supper."

Then, in an undertone to Gourville:

"Order them to harness my English horses," said he, "and tell them to drive to Paris and stop at the Hôtel de Ville."

CHAPTER LVI.

M. DE LA FONTAINE'S WINE.

Carriages were setting down the guests of Fouquet at Saint-Mandé and the entire household was feverishly busy with the preparations for supper during the time the superintendent's swift horses were galloping on the high road to Paris. Fouquet drove along the quays, wishing to meet as few people as possible on his route, and reached the Hôtel de Ville at a quarter to eight. He alighted at the corner of the Rue du Long-Pont and walked to the Place de Grève, accompanied by Gourville.

Just as they were entering it, their attention was attracted by a rather good-looking man, dressed in black and violet. He was about to get into a hired conveyance, and was directing the driver to drop him at Vincennes. In front of him was

a basket filled with bottles he had just purchased at the "*Image de Notre-Dame.*"

"Stop! why, it's Vatel, my steward!" said Fouquet to Gourville.

"Yes, monseigneur," answered the latter.

"What can he be doing at the '*Image de Notre-Dame*'?"

"Buying wine, I suppose."

"What! buying wine for me at a tavern?" said Fouquet. "My cellars must be in very poor condition!"

He advanced toward the steward, who was picking up the bottles and carefully arranging them in the carriage.

"Hullo, Vatel!" he called, in the tones of a master.

"Take care, monseigneur," said Gourville, "you may be recognized."

"Well, supposing I am, what do I care? Vatel!"

The man in black and violet turned round.

He had a mild and kindly but expressionless face, the face of a mathematician without its pride. A certain fire sparkled in his eyes and a pleasant smile played on his lips; but an observer would have quickly noticed that the fire was not illuminating and that the smile had no meaning.

Vatel laughed like a vacant-minded man and amused himself like a child.

At the sound of the voice that was calling him he turned.

"Ah," said he, "is it you, monseigneur?"

"Yes, it is. What the devil are you doing there? Is that wine I see? Buying wine at a tavern in the Place de Grève! This is even worse than if you bought it at the *Pomme de Pin* or the *Barreaux-Verts.*"

"But, monseigneur," replied Vatel, serenely, after hurling an angry glance at Gourville, "what business have you with me here? Have you had any fault to find with my cellar?"

"Certainly not, Vatel, certainly not; but —"

"But! but what?"

Gourville nudged the superintendent's elbow.

"Don't get angry, Vatel; I thought my cellar — I mean your cellar — sufficiently well supplied to obviate the necessity of having recourse to the '*Image de Notre-Dame.*'"

"Indeed, monsieur!" said Vatel, disdainfully dropping the "monseigneur." "Yes, your cellar is so well supplied that

when some of your guests dine with you they have nothing to drink."

Fouquet stared in amazement, first at Gourville, then at Vatel.

"What's that you're saying?"

"I am saying that your butler has not wines suitable to all tastes, monsieur, and so M. Pellisson, M. de la Fontaine, and M. Conrart never take anything when they visit you. These gentlemen do not like strong wines; what would you have me do, then?"

"But what have you done?"

"What have I done? I know they are very fond of a certain *vin de Joigny*, for they come here to drink it once every week. Now you know why I have bought wine at the '*Image de Notre-Dame*,' do you not?"

There was nothing more to be said. Indeed, Fouquet was almost affected.

Vatel had a good deal more to say, and evidently was warming up to the business in hand.

"I suppose the next thing you 'll do, monseigneur, will be to scold me for purchasing the cider M. Loret drinks, when he dines with you, in the Rue Planche-Mibray?"

"Loret drinks cider in my house, does he?" asked Fouquet, laughing.

"Yes, undoubtedly, monsieur; he would not take such pleasure in dining with you if he did n't."

"Vatel," cried Fouquet, pressing his hand, "you are an honest man! Thank you, Vatel, for understanding that in my house M. de la Fontaine, M. Conrart, and M. Loret are the equals of dukes and peers and princes, and superior to myself. Vatel, you are a good servant, and I double your salary."

Vatel did not seem at all grateful. He shrugged his shoulders slightly, and murmured these sublime words:

"To be thanked for having done one's duty is a humiliation!"

"He is right," said Gourville, drawing Fouquet's attention to another object by a gesture.

He pointed to a low cart drawn by four horses, in which two gibbets, clamped with iron and bound together, back to back, by means of chains, were rocking backward and forward, while an archer, seated on the broadest part of the beam, was enduring as well as he could the gibes of a crowd of young

vagabonds who had managed to detect the destination of the gibbets and who were escorting them to the Hôtel de Ville.

Fouquet gave a start.

"You see the matter has been decided," said Gourville.

"But the end has not come yet," answered Fouquet.

"Oh! do not labor under any illusion, monseigneur; if they have succeeded in putting your friendship and your suspicions to sleep, and if things have reached the point they evidently have reached, you can do nothing."

"But I have not affixed my signature to the sentence."

"M. de Lyonne has done so for you."

"I must go at once to the Louvre."

"No, you must not go to the Louvre."

"Would you advise me to act so basely?" cried Fouquet; "advise me to forsake my friends and fling down my arms, although still well able to fight with them?"

"I am not giving you any such advice, monseigneur. But are you in a position at the present moment to resign your office of superintendent?"

"No."

"But suppose the King wishes to give the post to some one else?"

"He can do so whether I am absent or present."

"Yes, but if you are absent you avoid wounding his feelings."

"Yes, but I shall have acted like a coward; now, I am not willing that my friends should die; and they shall not die."

"Take care! If you go to the Louvre, you will have either to defend your friends openly, in other words, to make a profession of faith, or else to abandon them altogether."

"Never!"

"Excuse me; the King will either propose this alternative to you, or else you will propose it to him yourself."

"That is true enough."

"A conflict between you and the King must, by all means, be avoided. Let us return to Saint-Mandé, monseigneur."

"Gourville, I shall not stir from this spot where the crime is to be consummated, and where my shame is to be wrought also. I shall not stir from here, I tell you, until I have discovered some way of combatting my enemies."

"Monseigneur," said Gourville, "you would excite my pity, did I not know that to you belongs one of the greatest intel-

lects to be found on the face of the world. You possess one hundred and fifty millions. Your position makes you the King's equal, your wealth makes you a hundred and fifty times his superior. M. Colbert had not even the ability to persuade the King to accept Mazarin's will. Now, if the man who is the richest man in the realm and who takes the trouble to spend his money is not able to do whatever he pleases, it is because he is a very poor specimen of a man. Let us, I repeat, return to Saint-Mandé."

"To consult Pellisson? Yes."

"No, monseigneur, to count your money."

"So be it!" cried Fouquet with flaming eyes. "Yes! yes! to Saint-Mandé!"

He got into his carriage and Gourville entered after him. At the end of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine they came up with the little conveyance of Vatel, who was riding home calmly with his *vin de Joigny*.

As the black horses dashed past at full speed, they frightened the timid hack of the steward, who, thrusting his head out of the window, cried in terror:

"Look out for my bottles!"

CHAPTER LVII.

THE GALLERY OF SAINT-MANDÉ.

Fifty persons were awaiting the superintendent's arrival. He did not even take time to place himself under the hands of a valet, but went directly from the hall to the principal drawing-room. All his friends were assembled in it and were engaged in conversation. The butler was bustling about the serving of the supper; but even he was not so busy as the Abbé Fouquet, who had been watching for his brother's return and endeavoring to do the honors of the house in his absence.

The superintendent's entrance was greeted with a murmur of joy and affection. Fouquet was loved by poets, artists, and all who had dealings with him, for his affability, liberality, and good humor. But that brow, upon which his little court was accustomed to read the movements of his soul and regulate their conduct thereby, as if it had been the brow of a god, – that

brow upon which the cares of state had never traced a furrow, was to-night paler than usual, and more than one eye remarked its pallor. However, Fouquet, seated at the head of the table, presided gayly over the supper. He related to La Fontaine Vatel's expedition, and gave Pellisson an account of the story of Menneville and the lean hen, in a voice so loud that the entire table heard it.

There was then an outburst of mocking laughter which was only brought to an end by a grave and melancholy gesture made by Pellisson.

The Abbé Fouquet was completely at a loss to see why his brother should turn the conversation on this particular subject. He listened with all his ears, and tried to read an explanation of the puzzle on the superintendent's face or on Gourville's, but the attempt was a failure.

Pellisson was the next to speak.

"They were talking about M. Colbert, then?" said he.

"Naturally," answered Fouquet, "if the report is true that the King has appointed him intendant."

No sooner did these words, uttered significantly and with an object, escape Fouquet's lips than there was a genuine explosion among his guests.

"A miser!" said one.

"A clown!" said another.

"A hypocrite!" said a third.

Pellisson and Fouquet exchanged meaning glances.

"Gentlemen," said the former, "really, we are treating badly a man with whom none of us is acquainted. It is neither charitable nor reasonable, and I am quite sure M. le Surintendant will agree with me."

"Entirely," replied Fouquet. "Let us lay aside M. Colbert's fat hens, and devote our attention to M. Vatel's truffled pheasants."

These words dispelled the gloomy cloud that had been hovering over the banqueters. Gourville worked so successfully upon the poets with the *vin de Joigny*, and the abbé — like every intelligent person who is forced by circumstances to try to appropriate his neighbor's money — worked so successfully to put the financiers and warriors in good humor, that the subject was lost sight of amid joyous outbursts and noisy conversation.

The will of Cardinal Mazarin was discussed during the sec-

ond course and the dessert; then Fouquet directed huge bowls of preserves and decanters of liqueurs to be placed in the drawing room adjoining the gallery. He led the way thither, his hand holding that of a lady, who was by this marked attention on his part created queen during the evening.

Afterwards the musicians had their supper, and the guests were beginning to think of a stroll through the gardens in the soft and balmy air, heavy with the perfumes of flowers.

Pellisson approached the superintendent.

"Has anything occurred to annoy you, monseigneur?" said he.

"Yes, and very seriously. Gourville will tell you about it," answered the minister.

Pellisson turned round and found himself face to face with La Fontaine. He could not escape until he had heard some Latin verses the poet had just composed on Vatel.

La Fontaine had been engaged during the last hour in scanning and polishing these same verses, and was now on the lookout for the complaisant listener upon whom he might unload them. He was rejoiced to think he had found him in Pellisson, but the latter managed to get away after a time. Then he charged down on Loret, but Loret was entirely taken up with a quatrain he himself had composed in honor of the supper, and the Amphytrion who gave it.

La Fontaine was anxious to declaim his verses; Loret was anxious to declaim his quatrain. The approach of Fouquet, linked arm in arm with the Comte de Chanost, obliged La Fontaine to stand aside and let them pass. The Abbé Fouquet, who suspected that the poet, absent-minded as usual, was sure to follow them and interrupt their conversation, intervened. La Fontaine, when he had him in his clutches, recited all his verses, from top to bottom. The abbé, who was absolutely innocent of Latin, moved his head up and down, to and fro, in cadence, imitating the rhythmical swaying of La Fontaine's body following the undulations of his dactyls and spondees.

During all this time, Fouquet, behind the bowls of preserves, was giving an account of the event of the day to M. de Chanost, his son-in-law.

"Better send all these triflers to see the fireworks," said Pellisson to Gourville, "so that we can talk at our ease."

"As you like," answered Gourville, who thereupon whispered a few words to Vatel.

Soon afterwards the latter might have been seen leading a crowd of beaux and belles and babblers of both sexes in the direction of the gardens. The men who remained inside strolled along the gallery, lit by three hundred wax tapers, in full view of all the people who had a taste for fireworks and who were now running about in the gardens.

Gourville, coming up close to Fouquet, said:

"Monseigneur, we are all here."

"All?" inquired Fouquet.

"Yes; count."

The superintendent turned around and counted. There were eight persons present.

Pellisson and Gourville then lounged along the corridor with apparent carelessness, talking, seemingly, on indifferent subjects. Loret and two officers imitated them, walking in an opposite direction.

The Abbé Fouquet was also walking, but by himself.

M. Fouquet had his arm linked in that of his son-in-law, looking as if he were listening eagerly to what the latter was saying.

"Gentlemen," said he, at length, "continue walking, but do not raise your heads and do not seem to pay any attention to me; we are now alone, listen."

A great hush fell at once upon the promenaders, only disturbed by the distant shouts of the merrymakers, who had now taken up positions in the groves, to get a better view of the fireworks.

A spectator of the scene must have been struck with its singularity; here were a number of men, all marching in separate groups, all apparently absorbed in something or other, yet all really hanging on the slightest word of one single person who was himself apparently taken up with the conversation of his neighbor.

"Gentlemen," said Fouquet, "you must have noticed that two of our friends are absent to-night who are usually present at our Wednesday receptions — For God's sake, abbé, do not stop; you can hear me without doing so. Walk, and carry your head as naturally as you can, and, as you have good eyes, keep close to the open window and warn us if any one is approaching in that direction by coughing."

The abbé obeyed.

"I did not notice that there were any absentees," observed

Pellisson, who at this moment had his back to Fouquet and was walking in the opposite direction.

"I did," muttered Loret; "I did not see M. Lyodot, who pays me my pension."

"And I," cried the abbé from the window, "did not see my dear friend D'Eymeris, who owes me eleven hundred livres since our last game."

"Loret," said Fouquet, gloomily, and with downcast head, "you will never more receive your pension from Lyodot; and you, abbé, will never receive your eleven hundred livres from D'Eymeris, for both are at the point of death."

"At the point of death?" they all exclaimed, brought to a stand by these terrible words in the midst of the theatrical scene they were playing.

"Keep cool, gentlemen," said Fouquet; "there are likely to be spies around. Yes, I said, 'at the point of death.'"

"At the point of death!" repeated Pellisson; "the men I saw not six days ago full of health and gayety and hope. What is man, O God! that disease should prostrate him in a moment!"

"They are not affected by disease," said Fouquet.

"Oh, then a remedy will be found for their sickness," rejoined Loret.

"There is no remedy. M. de Lyodot and M. d'Eymeris are on the eve of their last day upon earth."

"But what are they dying of, then?" asked an officer.

"Inquire of the man who slays them," replied Fouquet.

"Slays them! Who slays them?" cried the terrified chorus.

"Nay, they are to meet with a worse fate than death. They are to be hanged!" murmured Fouquet, in a hollow voice which echoed like a funeral knell through that rich gallery, brilliant with pictures and flowers, gold and velvet.

Involuntarily every one halted; the abbé left his window.

The first fireworks were beginning to rise above the crests of the trees.

A loud and prolonged shout from the gardens reached the superintendent's ears, summoning him, as it were, to come and enjoy the scene.

He approached a window; behind him stood his friends, attentive to his slightest wishes.

"Gentlemen," said he, "M. Colbert has had my two friends

arrested and tried; he will have them executed to-morrow. What course would you advise me to adopt?"

"*Mordieu!*" blurted out the abbé before any one else had a chance to speak, "some one must rip up Colbert."

"Monseigneur," said Pellisson, "some one must speak to his Majesty."

"My dear Pellisson, the King has already signed the order for the execution."

"Well, then," said the Comte de Chanost, "the execution must not take place; that is the main point."

"Impossible to prevent it," said Gourville, "except we can manage to corrupt the jailers."

"Or the governor," said Fouquet.

"The prisoners must be assisted to escape this very night. Who will take charge of the affair?"

"I will carry the money," said the abbé.

"And I will carry the offer," said Pellisson.

"The promise and the payment," said Fouquet. "An offer of half a million to the governor of the conciergerie should be enough; but if a million be required, it is ready."

"A million!" cried the abbé; "why, for less than the half of it I would sack the half of Paris!"

"We must have no disorder," said Pellisson; "the governor once won over, the prisoners can escape. Once they are safe they will set Colbert's enemies at his heels and prove to the King that, like everything else that is exaggerated, his boyish sense of justice is not infallible, either."

"Do you go to Paris, then, Pellisson," said Fouquet, "and bring the two victims back with you. To-morrow we shall see. Gourville, give the five hundred thousand livres to Pellisson."

"Don't let the wind carry you off your feet," said the abbé. "*Peste!* what a responsibility! Could n't I help you to bear it?"

"Silence!" said Fouquet. "There 's some one coming. What magical effects these fireworks produce!"

At this moment a rain of sparks fell, streaming through the branches of the wood next to the house.

Pellisson and Gourville passed out together through the gallery door; Fouquet and the five other conspirators went down to the gardens.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE EPICUREANS.

Since Fouquet gave — or, at least, appeared to be giving — all his attention to the dazzling illuminations, the languorous music of hautboys and violins, the sparkling showers of artificial fires that flamed in the heavens and lit up the gloomy silhouette of the donjon of Vincennes, and since he smiled on the ladies and the poets, the fête was quite as gay as any he had given before. Even Vatel, whose eyes sought those of the superintendent with restless and jealous persistency, showed that he was not dissatisfied with the reception given to his efforts to entertain the company.

After the fireworks were over the guests scattered through the gardens or formed groups under the marble porticoes, the master of the house, with the courteous hospitality and magnificent carelessness which distinguished him, leaving every one free to amuse himself after his own fashion.

The poets strayed, arm in arm, through the groves, or reclined on beds of moss, to the great damage of their velvet costumes and their curling locks, among which many a little dry leaf and blade of verdure had intruded.

Some of the ladies listened to the songs of the singers and the verses of the poets; others of them preferred listening to the elegant prose of certain individuals who were neither actors nor poets, but who displayed such unusual eloquence, under the inspiration of youth and solitude, that those whom they addressed were completely carried away by it.

"How is it," asked La Fontaine, "that our master Epicurus does not come down to this garden? Epicurus was not in the habit of abandoning his friends. Really, he is not treating us well."

"Monsieur," answered Conrart, "you have not the slightest reason for persisting in styling yourself an Epicurean. There is certainly nothing here to recall the doctrine of the philosopher of Gargetta."

"Nonsense!" retorted La Fontaine, "is it not written that Epicurus purchased a vast garden and lived tranquilly in it with his friends?"

"I admit you are right, thus far."

"Well, then, has not M. Fouquet purchased a large garden at Saint-Mandé, and does he not live tranquilly in it with his friends?"

"All that may be true enough. Unluckily for you, the fact of having a garden and having friends in it proves nothing. How does that show there is any resemblance between the doctrine of M. Fouquet and that of Epicurus?"

"Oh, but it does. One of the maxims of Epicurus is: 'Pleasure produces happiness.'"

"What follows?"

"It follows that we have every reason to consider ourselves happy; certainly I do. An excellent repast, a little *vin de Joigny*, — think of their kindness in going to my favorite tavern for it! — and not a single platitude uttered, though the supper lasted a full hour and there were ten millionaires and twenty poets at it."

"You stop just there! You have spoken of your *vin de Joigny* and of your elegant repast as some of the things that made you happy, have you not? Do you persist in your opinion?"

"I persist in it, ἀντέχω, as they say at Port-Royal."

"Then don't you remember that the great Epicurus lived, and made his disciples live, on bread, vegetables, and cold water?"

"That is not at all certain; I am afraid, my dear Conrart, you are confounding Epicurus with Pythagoras."

"Another thing you ought to recollect is that the ancient philosopher was not at all partial to gods and magistrates."

"Oh, you are quite wrong; Epicurus was like M. Fouquet."

"Do not draw any parallel between them," answered Conrart, with some emotion, "if you do not want to confirm the rumors that have already spread in connection with him and with ourselves."

"What rumors?"

"That we are bad Frenchmen, disaffected toward our sovereign and disobedient to the laws."

"I return, then, to my text," said La Fontaine. "Listen, Conrart, and I will tell you about the ethics of Epicurus who, I may as well say, is, in my opinion, a mythical personage. Indeed, most of the persons we meet with in antiquity are mythical. If you just give a little attention to the subject you will see that Jupiter is *life*, Alcides *strength*,

and so on. The words themselves are there to prove my theory: *Zeus*, that is ζῆν, to live; *Alcides*, ἀλκή, vigor. In the same way, Epicurus means gentle guardian, protector. Now, who guards the state better and protects individuals better than M. Fouquet?"

"You 're talking etymology, not morality. I affirm that we, modern Epicureans, are dangerous citizens."

"Oh," cried La Fontaine, "if we are dangerous citizens, we have not become so from following the maxims of the master. Listen to one of his principal aphorisms."

"I 'm all attention."

"'Wish for good leaders.'"

"Well?"

"Well! Is not M. Fouquet saying to us every day: 'When are we going to have a real government?' Is he or is he not? Come, now, Conrart, be honest."

"I acknowledge he is in the habit of saying that."

"And is n't that the doctrine of Epicurus?"

"It may be so; but it 's just a little bit seditious, all the same."

"What! seditious to wish to be governed by good leaders?"

"Most assuredly, when the leaders who govern are bad."

"Patience! I can give you an answer to everything."

"Even to what I have just stated?"

"Listen: 'Submit to those who govern badly.' Oh, I can give you the words in the original: κακῶς πολιτεύουδιν. You admit I am giving the words of the text correctly?"

"*Pardieu!* I should say so! Do you know you speak Greek as well as Æsop, my dear La Fontaine?"

"You 're not making fun of me, my dear Conrart?"

"God forbid!"

"Then let us get back to M. Fouquet. What is that he was always repeating from morning to night? Was it not: 'Oh! what a vulgar rascal Mazarin is! What an ass! What a blood-sucker! Still it is our duty to obey the blackguard.' Come, now, Conrart, did M. Fouquet ever say this or did he not?"

"Oh, I admit he said it, and a little bit too often, if I am not mistaken."

"He spoke just as Epicurus used to speak, my dear friend, exactly like Epicurus; we are all, I repeat, Epicureans, and it is decidedly enjoyable."

"Yes, but what I 'm afraid of is that another sect may start into existence in our neighborhood like that of Epictetus — you know whom I mean, the philosopher of Hieropolis, the man who looked on bread as a luxury, on vegetables as gluttony, and on cold water as drunkenness; the fellow who, after he had got a thrashing from his master, said to him, without other evidence of anger than a little grumbling: 'I 'll lay a wager you have broken my leg,' and who won his wager."

"Your Epictetus was a goose."

"Granted. But he might easily become the fashion by changing his name into Colbert."

"Bah! that would be impossible; you 'll never find anything like Colbert's name in Epictetus."

"Well, you are partly right. I certainly cannot find the word "*Colbert*" in his writings; but the word "*coluber*" [serpent] occurs often enough."

"Ah, you are beaten, Conrart, or you would never have tried to seek shelter behind a pun. M. Arnault may say that I am not logical — I am far more so than M. Nicolle."

"Yes," retorted Conrart, "you are logical enough, but then you are — a Jansenist."

This peroration was received with an immense outburst of laughter. The promenaders had been attracted gradually by the noisy exclamations of the two hair-splitters into the grove where they were vociferating. The whole discussion had been listened to with the most religious attention, and Fouquet, although he had found it hard to restrain himself, had given the others an example of self-control. But at the close of the dialogue he had to give way; he fairly roared with laughter. The rest joined in the hilarity, and the two philosophers were hailed with unanimous applause.

However, La Fontaine was declared the victor, because of his profound erudition and peerless logic.

Conrart was rewarded with the sympathy that usually falls to the lot of the unlucky combatant; he was praised for the honesty of his motives and the purity of his conscience.

Just at the moment when the spirits of the company had risen to the highest point, just when the ladies were reproaching the two antagonists for not finding a place for women in the Epicurean paradise, Gourville came up from the other end of the garden and approached Fouquet, who had his eyes

riveted upon him and had stepped aside from the party as soon as he perceived him.

The superintendent for a time retained his usual smile and usual nonchalant expression; but almost before he was out of sight he dropped the mask.

"Well," said he, eagerly, "where 's Pellisson? What is he doing?"

"Pellisson is back from Paris."

"Has he the prisoners with him?"

"He has not even been able to see the gatekeeper of the prison."

"What! did he not tell him he came from me?"

"He did; but the answer sent down by the gatekeeper was: 'Any one coming from M. Fouquet should have a letter from M. Fouquet.'"

"Oh!" cried the superintendent, "if a letter is all that is needed —"

"It would be of no use, monseigneur," cried Pellisson, appearing at the corner of the little wood. "Go yourself and speak in your own name."

"Yes, you are right; I 'll enter the house, pretending that I have to get through some work. Let the horses remain harnessed, Pellisson. Entertain my friends, Gourville."

"One last word of advice, monseigneur," answered the latter.

"Speak, Gourville."

"Don't go near the gatekeeper until the last moment. It may be a brave thing to do so, but it is not a wise one. Excuse me, M. Pellisson, if my opinion differs from yours. I entreat you, monseigneur, to send some one else with your proposals to this gatekeeper. He is, it is true, honest; but, for all that, you should not carry these offers to him yourself."

"I will think over the matter," said Fouquet; "I have the whole night to do so."

"Do not depend too much on the time you have, though it were twice as long as it really is," answered Pellisson; "it is never a fault to arrive too early."

"Adieu," said the superintendent. "Come along with me, Pellisson. Gourville, I rely on you to take care of my guests."

And he started.

The Epicureans never perceived that the chief of their school had left them; the musicians continued to play during the whole night.

CHAPTER LIX.

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATE.

Fouquet, when he left the house for the second time that day, felt less anxious and depressed than could have been expected under the circumstances.

He turned round to Pellisson, who, in his own corner of the carriage, was meditating gravely on certain points he believed might be used successfully to meet the violent assaults of Colbert.

"My dear Pellisson," Fouquet said, "it's a great pity you are not a woman."

"I think, on the contrary, it is very lucky," replied Pellisson. "You see, monseigneur, I am so exceedingly ugly."

"Pellisson! Pellisson!" said the superintendent, laughing, "if you refer so frequently to your ugliness, every one will be convinced that it's a terrible affliction to you."

"And so it is, monseigneur; I am the most unfortunate man in the world; I was handsome until the small-pox made me hideous and deprived me of all my seductive qualities. Yes, now that I am your clerk, or something very near it, now that I am so closely connected with your interests, I could render you important service if I were a pretty woman."

"Of what kind?"

"I would make a call on the governor and would be sure to make a slave of him, for he is a gallant and extravagantly fond of women. Then I would carry off our two prisoners."

"I am in hopes of doing that myself, although I am not a pretty woman," replied Fouquet.

"No doubt you can, monseigneur; but you incur an awful risk."

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, abruptly, with one of those secret transports which spring from the heart that is warmed by the generous blood of youth or by some sweet emotion; "oh, I know a woman who will play the very part that is to save us with the governor!"

"Why, I know fifty such women, monseigneur, fifty women who will afterward trumpet your generosity and your devotion to your friends throughout the universe, and who, sooner

or later, by the very means they have taken to bring about their own ruin, will bring about yours."

"I am not speaking of that class of women, Pellisson; the woman I speak of is as noble as she is beautiful, a woman with the wit and intelligence of her own sex and the coolness and valor of ours; I speak of a woman of such loveliness that the very walls of a prison might bow down to salute her, of such prudence that she will never allow any one to suspect even by whom she has been sent."

"A treasure," said Pellisson; "what an inestimable present you are making to M. le Gouverneur! Of course, he may lose his head, that is not at all improbable; but he can boast before his death that he has enjoyed such felicity as seldom falls to the lot of man."

"Allow me to say that the governor of the conciergerie stands in no danger of losing his head, for I will furnish horses for his flight and five hundred thousand livres to enable him to live like a gentleman in England. Allow me to say also that the lady who is my friend will grant him nothing except horses and money. We must go and find this woman, Pellisson."

The superintendent reached out his hand to the gold and silken cord inside the carriage. Pellisson stopped him.

"Monseigneur," said he, "you would spend as much time in searching for this woman as Columbus did in discovering America, and, if we are to succeed, what we have to do must be done in less than two hours. If the governor has gone to bed, how can you get to see him without creating a great disturbance? And, if daylight breaks in upon us, how can we hide our plans? Go, go to him yourself, monseigneur, and don't go hunting after either a woman or an angel to-night."

"But, my dear Pellisson, we are now in front of her house."

"In front of the angel's house?"

"Yes."

"Why, this is the hôtel of Madame de Bellière!"

"Hush!"

"Heavens above us!" cried Pellisson.

"What have you to say against her?" inquired Fouquet.

"Nothing. Alas! that is the very thing that drives me to despair. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Oh! if it were only in my power to tell you something about her that might prevent you from seeing her!"

But Fouquet had already ordered the coachman to stop.

"Prevent me from seeing her!" he cried, "no power on earth could prevent me from paying my compliments to Madame du Plessis-Bellière. Besides, who can tell but we may stand in need of her assistance. Are you coming with me?"

"No, monseigneur, no."

"But I do not like to keep you waiting for me," answered Fouquet, with his usual frank courtesy.

"So much the better, monseigneur; if you know you are keeping me waiting, you may possibly abridge your visit — by the way, there is a carriage in the court-yard. Take care, monseigneur; she has evidently some one with her!"

Fouquet leaned out and looked in the direction of the carriage.

"Oh, monseigneur!" cried Pellisson; "for God's sake do not visit this lady until after you have been to the conciergerie."

"Only for five minutes, Pellisson," answered Fouquet, springing out of his carriage and landing on the very steps of the hôtel.

Pellisson threw himself back in the carriage, in anything but a good temper.

Fouquet ran up to the marquise's apartments and gave his name to a valet, who treated him with a respect and deference that proved how high his name stood in the regard of the mistress of the household.

"M. le Surintendant!" she exclaimed, turning pale as she advanced to meet him, "this is a very great honor, — an unexpected pleasure."

Then, in a whisper:

"Be on your guard; Marguerite Vanel is with me."

"Madame," replied Fouquet, considerably disturbed, "I am here on a matter of business — just to say a few words, but they are on a very important subject."

And he entered the drawing-room.

Madame Vanel rose. She was more wan and livid than a statue of envy. Fouquet saluted her in his most gracious and conciliatory fashion. Her answer was a terrible look, hurled at the marquise as well as at Fouquet. The barbed glance of a jealous woman is a stiletto that finds the weak point in the best-wrought armor; and such a stiletto did Marguerite plunge into the hearts of the two confidants. After a courtesy to her

bosom friend, and a profound reverence to Fouquet, she took her departure, saying she had several other calls to make, before either the marquise, who was struck dumb with amazement, or Fouquet, who was very much discomposed, had thought of detaining her.

Immediately she was outside the door and Fouquet was alone with the marquise, he fell upon his knees, without uttering a word.

"I was expecting you," said the marquise, with a gentle smile.

"Oh, that cannot be, or you would have sent that woman away."

"She came only a quarter of an hour ago, and I never suspected she could think of calling at so late an hour."

"Then you love me a little, marquise?"

"That is not the question at present, monsieur; your perilous situation is the question. How are matters going with you now?"

"I purpose rescuing my friends from the conciergerie tonight."

"How are you going to set about it?"

"By buying, bribing the governor."

"He is a friend of mine. Can I aid you in any way?"

"Oh, marquise, you can render me a signal service. The trouble is to succeed in discovering a way to avail myself of your kindness without compromising you. I would not purchase life, power, nay, even liberty, at the cost of one tear from your eyes, one cloud upon your brow."

"Monseigneur, speak not such words, they intoxicate me. I feel as if I were guilty when I determined to do you a service; I did not then calculate the full meaning of what I was doing. I love you, it is true, but I love you as some fond friend might love you, and, like such a friend, I am grateful for your delicacy. But alas! alas! I can never be your mistress."

"Marquise!" cried Fouquet, in tones of agonizing despair, "why not?"

"Because you are loved by too many," answered the young woman, in a low voice; "because the splendors of glory and success hurt my eyes, while the darkness of sorrow affects them sympathetically; because, in short, I who repulsed you amid your ostentatious magnificence, I who hardly gave you a

thought in your grandeur, I have been tempted to fling myself into your arms like some crazed woman when I saw that a terrible calamity was swooping down upon your head. Monseigneur, you understand me now. O! monseigneur, become once more happy and triumphant that I may become once more chaste in heart and soul; your ruin would be the forerunner of mine."

"Oh! madame," answered Fouquet, thrilled by emotions he had never felt before, "should I fall into the lowest gulf of human wretchedness, but yet hear those words from your lips which they refuse to utter to-day, you would be deceived in your noble egotism, you would believe you were consoling the most unfortunate of men; but the moment you uttered the words, 'I love you!' you would have spoken them to the most enraptured, the most triumphant, the most exalted of human beings!"

He was still at her feet, devouring her hand with kisses, when Pellisson rushed into the chamber, crying angrily:

"Monseigneur! madame! Madame, pray excuse my abrupt entry. Monseigneur, you have been here for half an hour. Oh, do not look at me so reproachfully! Have the goodness to tell me, madame, who left you when monseigneur visited you?"

"Madame Vanel," answered Fouquet.

"There!" cried Pellisson, "I was sure of it!"

"Why, what's the matter?"

"She was quite pale when she entered her carriage."

"How does that concern me?"

"Yes, but what does concern you is the nature of the order she gave her coachman."

"Good heavens! what was it?" exclaimed the marquise.

"To drive to M. Colbert's," said Pellisson, hoarsely.

"Great God, Monseigneur, begone! Begone at once!" cried the marquise, pushing Fouquet out of the room, while Pellisson dragged him by the hand.

"Do you really think I am a child, to be frightened at a shadow?" asked the superintendent.

"You are a giant," said the marquise, "but a viper is trying to bite your heel."

Pellisson never stopped dragging Fouquet along until he had him in the carriage. Then he shouted to the coachman:

"To the conciergerie; drive like mad!"

The horses were off like a shot. No obstacle retarded their

speed until they came to the Arcade Saint-Jean and were about to enter the Place de Grève. There the superintendent's carriage was stopped by a long file of horsemen who filled the narrow passage. It was impossible to force this barrier or do anything except wait until the mounted archers of the watch — to which body the men belonged — had passed through with the heavy coach they were escorting and which was making its way rapidly toward the Place Baudoyer.

The only attention this incident excited in the minds of Fouquet and Pellisson arose from regret at having to waste even a minute on their way.

Five minutes later they were in presence of the governor of the conciergerie.

This officer was still walking about in the front yard.

When Pellisson whispered Fouquet's name in his ear, he ran eagerly to the carriage, and with hat in hand, bowed repeatedly to the very ground.

"You do me a great honor, monseigneur," said he.

"Pray, M. le Gouverneur," returned Fouquet, "would you do me the favor to take a seat in my carriage?"

The officer at once entered the carriage and took the proffered seat.

"Monsieur," said Fouquet, "I want you to do me a service."

"What is it, monseigneur?"

"It is a perilous service, monsieur, but a service that will make me your friend and protector forever."

"If you asked me to throw myself into the fire for you, monseigneur, I would do it."

"Thanks," answered Fouquet, "but what I ask is easier than that."

"It is granted already. What do you want me to do, monseigneur?"

"To conduct me to the cells of M. Lyodot and M. d'Eymeris."

"Would you kindly explain for what purpose, monseigneur?"

"I will tell you in their presence, monsieur, and also furnish you with the means of exonerating yourself from the charge of helping them to escape."

"Escape! Then you do not know what has happened, monseigneur?"

"Happened?"

"MM. Lyodot and D'Eymeris are no longer here."

"Since when?" cried Fouquet, trembling.

"Since a quarter of an hour ago."

"And where are they now?"

"In the keep at Vincennes."

"What caused them to be transferred?"

"An order of the King."

"Oh, woe! woe!" cried Fouquet, striking his forehead; "woe! woe!"

And, without another word to the governor, he fell back in his carriage, despair in his heart and death in his face.

"Well?" said Pellisson, anxiously.

"Well, our friends are lost! Colbert has sent them to Vincennes. It was their carriage that stopped us at the Arcade Saint-Jean!"

Pellisson was thunderstruck. He did not answer. To utter a reproach would be to kill his master.

"Where shall I drive you, monseigneur?" asked the coachman.

"To my hôtel in Paris. Return to Saint-Mandé, Pellisson, and send me the Abbé Fouquet within an hour. Go!"

CHAPTER LX.

THE PLAN OF BATTLE.

When the Abbé Fouquet reached his brother the night was very far advanced.

Gourville was the abbé's companion. These three men, with their pale faces, upon which a dreaded future had left its mark, looked more like three conspirators, united by the ties that bind those who plot a deed of violence, than like three of the prominent men of the time.

Fouquet walked restlessly up and down the room, with downcast eyes and hands that clasped each other nervously.

At length, after a deep sigh, he turned courageously to the subject that had brought the three together.

"Abbé," said he, "you spoke to-day of certain people in your employment?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered the abbé.

"Honestly, who are these people?"

The abbé hesitated.

"Come, now, don't be afraid, I am not threatening you; no gasconading, I am not in a humor for jesting."

"Then, as you insist on the truth, monsieur, here it is: I have a hundred and twenty friends or comrades who would go through fire and water for me."

"You can count on them, then?"

"For anything."

"And you will not be compromised yourself?"

"I will not even be seen among them."

"They are determined fellows, are they?"

"If I promise them they will not be burned themselves, they will burn down Paris for me."

"What I wish to ask you, abbé," said Fouquet, wiping off the moisture that streamed down his cheeks, "is this: can you, at a given moment, hurl these one hundred and twenty men of yours on the people I will point out to you?"

"It would not be the first time for them to do a thing like that, monsieur."

"No doubt. But would these bandits attack an armed force?"

"It is customary with them to do so."

"Then collect your one hundred and twenty men, abbé."

"With pleasure. But where?"

"On the road to Vincennes, at two o'clock to-morrow exactly."

"To carry off Lyodot and D'Eymeris? There will be some hard knocks, won't there?"

"Plenty of them. Are you afraid?"

"Not for myself, but for you."

"Will your men know the nature of the enterprise they are engaged in?"

"They are too intelligent not to guess at it. Now, the minister who is at the bottom of a riot directed against his king — is exposed to —"

"What is that to you if I pay you? Moreover, if I fall, you fall with me."

"Then you will act more prudently, monsieur, by not stirring in the matter and letting the King have his little amusement."

"Abbé, I would have you ponder deeply on this: the imprisonment of Lyodot and D'Eymeris is but the prelude to the ruin of our house. If I am arrested, you will be imprisoned; if I am imprisoned, you will be banished."

"Monsieur, I am at your orders. What are they?"

"Those I have just mentioned. I want you to save to-morrow the two financiers from the fury of my enemies; they shall not be sacrificed when so many other criminals go unpunished. You can adopt whatever measures you like. But is the thing feasible?"

"Quite feasible."

"What is your plan?"

"The richest thing about my plan is its simplicity. There are usually a dozen archers present at an execution."

"There will be a hundred to-morrow."

"I know it; nay, I know more: there will be two hundred to-morrow."

"Then your hundred and twenty men will not be sufficient?"

"Excuse me. In every crowd composed of, say, a hundred thousand spectators, there are ten thousand robbers or pickpockets; but they never dare to start a tumult themselves."

"Well?"

"My one hundred and twenty men, then, will have ten thousand auxiliaries on the Place de Grève, which I select as my battlefield. My men will begin the attack; the others will finish it."

"Good! But what will your men do with the two prisoners when they have rescued them?"

"I'll tell you. They will hurry them into some house in the Place de Grève, from which they cannot be taken except by a siege in regular form. And — but hold on, I have got another idea grander still. Some of the houses have two entrances, one on the square, the other on the Rue de la Mortellerie, the Rue de la Vannerie, or the Rue de la Tixeranderie. The prisoners can come in by the one and pass out by the other."

"Yes, but fix on something definite."

"Just what I am searching for."

"And what I have found," cried Fouquet. "Listen attentively to something that has only just now flashed across my mind."

"I am listening."

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville, who apparently understood it.

"One of my friends occasionally lends me the keys of a house he rents in the Rue Baudoyer. Now, the gardens of this house are very spacious and extend to the rear of a house on the Place de Grève."

"Then we have the game in our hands," said the abbé. "Which house is it?"

"A tavern that is very much frequented. Its sign is the '*Image de Notre-Dame.*'"

"I know it," said the abbé.

"Two of its windows look on the square; there is an entrance to a yard in the rear, and I have reason to believe there is a door of communication between this yard and my friend's gardens."

"Nothing could be better."

"You enter the tavern with your prisoners; then you defend the door long enough to give them time to escape through the garden and reach the Place Baudoyer."

"Just the thing! Why, monsieur, you would make as great a general as M. le Prince!"

"You understand everything?"

"Perfectly."

"How much money will you need to intoxicate these bravoes of yours and fill their maws with gold?"

"Oh, monsieur, what an expression! I would n't like to be in your place if they heard you! Some of them are very touchy."

"I mean they must be thrown into such a state that they shall no longer know the difference between earth and heaven, for to-morrow I enter the lists against a king, and I wish to come out of them the victor, do you understand?"

"I will obey your orders, monsieur. Have you any other suggestions to make?"

"No, the rest is your business."

"Then give me your purse."

"Gourville, give a hundred thousand livres to the abbé."

"Good. You told me to spare no expense, I think?"

"Yes."

"Capital!"

"Monseigneur," objected Gourville, "if this thing becomes known, we shall lose our heads."

"Gourville," retorted Fouquet, purple with anger, "you excite my pity! Speak for yourself, my good fellow. My head is firm on my shoulders and is likely to remain so. Now, abbé, is everything settled?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"At two to-morrow?"

"No, at noon. Our auxiliaries must be primed secretly for the occasion."

"You're right. Don't spare the tavern-keeper's wine."

"I don't intend sparing either his wine or his house," rejoined the abbé, with a grin. "I have my plan, I tell you; let me put it in operation, and you 'll see."

"Where shall you be yourself?"

"Everywhere and nowhere."

"And how shall I receive information?"

"By a courier whose horse shall stand ready saddled in your friend's garden. By the way, your friend's name?"

Fouquet looked again at Gourville, who came to the help of his master.

"You will easily recognize the places, M. l'Abbé. You know something of the tavern of the '*Image de Notre-Dame.*' The gardens — the only ones in that quarter — are behind it, and the other house behind the gardens."

"All right, then, I will go and give notice to my soldiers."

"Go with the abbé, Gourville, and hand him the money," said Fouquet. "But wait a moment, abbé, wait a moment, both of you. What name do you intend to give to this violent attack, this rescue?"

"A very natural one, monsieur — riot."

"But why a riot? The people of Paris are never so devoted to their kings as when they hang a few financiers."

"I 'll manage all that," said the abbé.

"Yes, but you will manage it badly, and that will set people guessing."

"No, no — I 've got another idea."

"What is it?"

"My men will cry out; 'Colbert! hurrah for Colbert!' They will then rush on the prisoners, as if they wanted to tear them to pieces; they will carry them off as if they thought hanging too good for them."

"Well, upon my word, that is really a capital idea!" said Gourville. "What an imagination you have, M. l'Abbé!"

"Monsieur, one must be worthy of one's family," responded the abbé, proudly.

"A singular animal!" murmured Fouquet. Then he added aloud:

"A very ingenious idea, indeed! Carry it out, abbé, but shed no blood."

Gourville and the abbé passed out together, both very much excited.

The superintendent stretched himself on some cushions, but was kept awake, partly by thoughts of to-morrow's sinister enterprise, partly by thoughts of love.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE TAVERN OF THE "IMAGE DE NOTRE-DAME."

At two o'clock the next day some fifty thousand spectators were gathered around the two gibbets erected on the Place de Grève between the Quai de la Grève and the Quai Pelletier. These gibbets stood side by side, propped against the parapet of the river.

On that morning also, all the duly sworn criers of the good city of Paris had traversed the different quarters, particularly the *halles* and faubourgs, proclaiming with their hoarse but unwearied voices the great justice done by the King on two peculators, two thieves who had impoverished the people. And this same people whose interests were being so warmly defended, not to be lacking in respect for its King, poured out of its shops, stalls, and factories, anxious to show some little gratitude to Louis XIV., absolutely like invited guests who were afraid of displaying a lack of politeness if they did not repair to the house of the person who had invited them. In accordance with the tenor of the sentence, which the criers read loudly but badly, two revenue farmers, monopolists of money, spendthrifts of the royal treasury, extortioners and forgers, would suffer capital punishment on the Place de Grève, "their names being posted above their heads."

As to these names, they were not mentioned in the sentence.

The curiosity of the Parisians was at its height, and so, as we have stated, an immense crowd was waiting with feverish

impatience for the hour fixed for the execution. The news had already spread that the prisoners had been transferred to the Château de Vincennes and would be led from that prison to the Place de Grève. Consequently the faubourg and the Rue de Saint-Antoine were thronged, for the Parisians who assemble on days of execution may be divided into two classes: gentle, timid-hearted beings, but with a touch of philosophical curiosity, who just want to see the passage of the condemned, and emotional persons who are eager to satiate their emotions by witnessing the death of the criminals.

On this day M. d'Artagnan, after receiving his final instructions from the King and bidding adieu to his friends, drew up a plan for spending the said day, as every busy man ought to do, for each of his moments has its particular occupation and he appreciates its value.

"I start on my journey," said he, "at daybreak, that is, at three in the morning; I have fifteen hours before me, then. Subtract six hours for sleep, which I cannot do without — six; an hour for breakfast — seven; an hour's visit to Athos — eight; two hours for things that may turn up unexpectedly. Sum total — ten.

"Five hours left.

"An hour to draw my money, in other words, to be told by M. Fouquet I can't have any; an hour to go and get it from M. Colbert and at the same time stand his questions and grimaces; an hour to furbish up my weapons and clothes and have my boots polished.

"Remainder: two hours — *Mordioux!* how rich I am!"

And as he uttered these words, a singular sensation of joy thrilled him; a perfume wafted from the beautiful and happy years of another time mounted to his brain and intoxicated him.

"During these two hours," said the musketeer, "I shall go to the '*Image de Notre-Dame*' and collect my quarter's rent. That will be delightful. Three hundred and seventy-five livres! *Mordioux!* is n't it amazing! If the poor man who had only a livre in his pocket should suddenly discover that that livre had increased to a livre and twelve deniers, that would be only what I call justice. But such a piece of luck never falls to the lot of the poor man. The rich man, on the other hand, has only to let his money lie quiet, and he gets his income from it. Here are three hundred and seventy-five livres which have apparently dropped on me from the skies.

"I will go, then, to the '*Image de Notre-Dame*' and drink with my tenant the glass of port that he is pretty sure to offer me.

"But, M. d'Artagnan, you must observe order; order is essential. I shall, therefore, organize my time into its due divisions and assign to each its proper duty:

"*Article 1.* — Athos.

"*Article 2.* — '*Image de Notre-Dame.*'

"*Article 3.* — M. Fouquet.

"*Article 4.* — M. Colbert.

"*Article 5.* — Supper.

"*Article 6.* — Clothes, boots, horses, a portmanteau.

"*Article 7 and last.* — Sleep."

Having arranged his schedule, D'Artagnan made his way straight to the home of the Comte de la Fère, to whom he gave a modest and artless account of part of his lucky adventures.

Athos had been somewhat uneasy about his friend ever since the evening before D'Artagnan's visit to the King; but he appeared satisfied with the few words of explanation he received. He surmised that the King had confided some important mission to the musketeer, and did not make the slightest attempt to draw the secret from him. He merely cautioned him to take good care of himself, suggesting, however, that he was willing to accompany him, if that were desirable.

"But, my dear friend," answered D'Artagnan, "I am not going anywhere."

"What! you come to bid me good-bye, and yet you are not going anywhere?"

"Oh, yes, yes, I am," said D'Artagnan, reddening; "but it is only to buy a piece of property."

"Oh, that is another matter. Then I will have to change my formula. Instead of saying, 'Do not get killed,' I will say, 'Do not get robbed.'"

"Should I have my eye on some little property, I will notify you of the fact, my dear friend, in hopes that you may do me the favor of giving me your advice."

"Yes, yes," replied Athos, whose exquisite delicacy would not allow him even the compensation of a smile.

Raoul showed the same reserve his father did. D'Artagnan began to think it would make the thing look too mysterious if he took leave of his friends without telling them something of the road he intended taking.

"I have a notion to visit Le Mans," said he. "It is a fine country, is it not?"

"Excellent, my friend," answered the count, who refrained from adding that Le Mans lay in the same direction as Touraine, and that by waiting two days at the farthest he could make the journey with a friend.

But D'Artagnan, who was not at all as free from embarrassment as the count, at each explanation dug deeper the hole in the morass into which he was sinking gradually.

"I shall have to start at daybreak to-morrow," he said at last; "could you stay with me until then, Raoul?"

"Yes, M. le Chevalier," returned the young man, "provided M. le Comte does not need me."

"No, Raoul; I am to have an audience to-day with Monsieur, the King's brother."

Raoul requested Grimaud to bring him his sword, which the old man did immediately.

"And now, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan to Athos, stretching out his arms, "farewell!"

Athos held him in a long embrace, and the musketeer, who had good reason to know his discretion, whispered in his ear:

"A state affair!"

To which Athos replied with a pressure of the hand that was more significant than words.

Then they separated. Raoul took the arm of his old friend, who led him up the Rue Saint-Honoré.

"I am conducting you to the abode of the god Plutus," said D'Artagnan to the young man, "be prepared, you will see nothing but piles of crowns the whole day — Good heavens! what a change there is in me!"

"Look! look!" cried Raoul, "what a crowd there is in the street!"

"Is there a procession to-day?" asked D'Artagnan of one of the passers-by.

"No, monsieur, a hanging," was the answer.

"You don't say so! a hanging on the Grève?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Devil take the rascal!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Could n't he have chosen some other day for getting hanged than the one on which I collect my rent at the '*Image de Notre-Dame*?' I say, Raoul, have you ever seen any one hanged?"

"Never, monsieur, thank God!"

"Well, well, you are young! If you had happened to be on guard at the trenches, as I have been, and some rascally spy should — but excuse me, Raoul, there I am beginning to dote again. You are right, it is a hideous sight. At what hour does the execution take place, monsieur, if you please?"

"Monsieur," answered the stranger, deferentially, delighted at the chance of having a conversation with two warriors, "at three, I think."

"And it is now only half-past one. If we stretch our legs we 'll have plenty of time to gobble up that three hundred and seventy-five livres and be off again before the appearance of the culprit."

"*Culprits*, monsieur," rejoined the citizen, "for there are two of them."

"A thousand thanks," said D'Artagnan, who grew more polite the older he became. And hurrying Raoul along, he walked rapidly to the quarter of the Grève.

But for the musketeer's familiarity with crowds, the irresistible strength of his wrist, and the extraordinary suppleness of his shoulders, neither of the two pedestrians would have reached his destination.

They were going along the quay, which they had entered from the Rue Saint-Honoré, the street they had walked through after leaving Athos.

D'Artagnan marched in front, his elbow, fist, and shoulders forming three wedges which he drove skilfully into the groups before him, splitting, shattering them as if they had been chunks of wood.

Now and then he brought the iron hilt of his sword into play. When he found that ribs clung together too rebelliously, he inserted it between them and, using it as a lever or crowbar, often separated the wife from her spouse, the uncle from his nephew, or brother from brother. But all this was done so naturally, was accompanied by such gracious smiles that only those possessed of ribs of bronze would have failed to cry, "Thank you!" when hilt and fist were brought into action; indeed, the smiles on the musketeer's lips were so dazzling that it would take a heart of adamant to resist them.

Raoul, at his friend's back, humored the women, who were taken with his beauty, pushed back the men, who had a wholesome respect for his muscles, and, thanks to such

manœuvring, both of them managed to cleave the rather dense and somewhat dirty tide of the populace.

When they came in sight of the two gibbets, Raoul turned away his eyes in disgust. As for D'Artagnan, he did not see them at all; his whole attention was absorbed in the contemplation of his house with its denticulated gable and its windows thronged with sightseers.

Still he was able to notice, scattered about the square, quite a number of musketeers, evidently on furlough, some with women, others with friends, and all waiting impatiently for the ceremony.

But the most delectable spectacle of all was that of his tenant; the tavern-keeper was so busy that he did not seem to know which way to turn. His three waiters were entirely unable to serve the crowd of customers that packed the shop and rooms, even the yard.

D'Artagnan called Raoul's attention to the throng, adding:

"The rogue won't have any excuse for being slow with his rent. Look at all these carousers, Raoul; seems as if they were having a jolly time of it. But, *mordioux!* we can't get in."

However, after a good deal of trouble, D'Artagnan caught his tenant by the apron and was recognized by him.

"Ah!" cried the worthy tapster, who was half crazy, "in a moment, M. le Chevalier, if you please. There are a hundred madmen here who are turning my cellar upside down."

"The cellar, I hope, but not your money box."

"Oh, monsieur, your thirty-seven and a half pistoles are all right; they are up yonder in my room. But there are also in that very room a hundred topers who are sucking the staves of a little barrel of port I tapped for them this morning. Give me a minute, only just a minute."

"Yes, yes, you can have the minute."

"I am going," whispered Raoul to D'Artagnan; "such dissipation is disgusting."

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, sternly, "you will do me the favor to remain where you are. The soldier ought to familiarize himself with all kinds of spectacles. The eyes of the young have certain fibres which must be hardened, and the man who is truly noble and generous is the man who has had his eyes hardened while his heart remains tender. Besides, my young friend, surely you would not leave me here by myself?

It would hardly be treating me fairly. There is a yard over there, and a tree in the yard. Let us get under its shade; we'll breathe more freely there than in this wine-sodden atmosphere."

The spot selected by the two latest guests of the "*Image de Notre-Dame*" was admirably suited for observation. Had D'Artagnan been on a scouting expedition he could not have been better posted for his purpose; the ever-increasing murmurs of the popular tide smote upon his ears and upon those of his companion, and they lost not a cry or gesture of the revellers, who were either sitting at the tables in the tavern or scattered through the rooms.

The foliage of the tree under which they sat was already very thick. It was a stunted chestnut with pendent branches overshading a table so dilapidated that even the tipplers had given it a wide berth.

As we have said already, D'Artagnan could see everything from this post of observation: the coming and going of the waiters, the arrival of new drinkers, the reception given them — friendly here, hostile there — at the different tables. He took in all this, however, only with the view of killing time, for his thirty-seven and a half pistoles were very tardy in paying him a visit.

Raoul drew his attention to the fact.

"Monsieur," said he, "you are not hurrying your tenant, and the condemned men will soon be here. When they are, the crush will be too great to permit us to escape."

"You 're right," answered the musketeer. "Hello! somebody, *mordioux!*"

But shout as loud and rap as hard as he might — the table fell into chips beneath the weight of his first — no one came.

D'Artagnan was on the point of starting after the innkeeper himself and having an explanation with him, when the door of the yard where they were sitting, a door communicating with the gardens in the rear, opened, creaking harshly on its rusty hinges, and a man in the costume of a horseman, with a scabbard and sword, but in his hand, not at his side, walked across the yard without shutting the door behind him. With a side glance at D'Artagnan and his companion, he made straight for the tavern, glancing at everything on the way with eyes that seemed capable of piercing walls or consciences.

"Aha!" thought D'Artagnan; "so my tenants have means

of communication with — ah ! only some fellow eager to see the hanging."

But at that very moment the uproar made by the revellers in the upper chambers ceased ; the silence in such circumstances was far more amazing than would be a louder renewal of the noise. D'Artagnan determined to investigate the cause of this sudden silence.

He then perceived that the man in the garb of a cavalier had entered the principal room and was haranguing the drinkers, who listened to him with the utmost attention. D'Artagnan would, perhaps, have heard what he was saying, had not the shouting of the populace formed an overmastering accompaniment to the eloquence of the orator. But the discourse soon came to an end, and all the persons in the tavern passed out, one after the other, and in little groups. Not all, however ; six remained behind in the room, and one of the six — the man with the sword — took the landlord aside, engaging him in conversation of a more or less serious kind, while the others were building a huge fire in the chimney-place : a rather queer thing to do, considering that the day was fine and the temperature warm.

" It is singular," said D'Artagnan to Raoul ; " but I 'm sure I know these faces."

" Do you not think it smells of smoke here ? " inquired Raoul.

" I am inclined to fancy that what I see smells rather of conspiracy," answered D'Artagnan.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when four men came down into the yard and, without showing any sign of evil intentions, mounted guard in the neighborhood of the door of communication, occasionally darting looks at D'Artagnan that meant a good deal.

" *Mordioux !* " whispered D'Artagnan to Raoul, " something 's up ! Are you inquisitive, Raoul ? "

" That depends, M. le Chevalier."

" Well, I am as inquisitive as an old woman. Come a little farther in front. We shall have a better view of the square. I would lay a wager that that view will be something worth seeing."

" But you know, monsieur, I do not like being a passive and indifferent spectator of the death of these poor wretches."

" And do you believe I am a savage ? We will go in again when it is time to do so. Come along."

They entered the house and made their way to a window in front, which, strange to say, had remained unoccupied.

The two drinkers inside, instead of looking through this window, were keeping up the fire.

When they saw D'Artagnan and Raoul coming in:

"Hum!" they muttered, "a reinforcement."

D'Artagnan jogged Raoul's elbow.

"Yes, my bully lads," said he, "a reinforcement. *Cordieu!* there's a fire for you! What are you going to roast?"

The two men burst into a jovial roar, and, instead of answering, heaped on more wood.

D'Artagnan never took his eyes off them.

"I suppose," said one of the fellows, "you were sent to tell us the time, were you not?"

"Of course we were," replied D'Artagnan, eager to learn what was going on. "What else could bring me here?"

"Then keep at the window and watch, if you please."

D'Artagnan smiled in his mustache, beckoned to Raoul, and went obediently to the window.

CHAPTER LXII.

"COLBERT FOREVER!"

The aspect of the Grève at this moment was frightful.

Heads appearing all on a level in perspective extended as far as the eye could see, jammed close together, rocking backward and forward, like ears of corn on a vast plain. From time to time, at some vague and indistinct noise, some faint, far-away sound, these thousands of heads would oscillate, these thousands of eyes would shoot forth flame.

Sometimes there were mighty retrogressions. Then all these ears bent and turned into waves more restless than those of the ocean, waves which rolled from the extremities to the centre, and like an incoming tide dashed against the hedge of archers that encompassed the scaffold.

Thereupon the handles of the halberds fell heavily on the heads and shoulders of the rash invaders; sometimes, too, the blade and not the wood was used, with the result that a wide,

empty circle was made around the guard, a vacancy gained at the expense of the extremities, which had, in their turn, to suffer from the consequences of the sudden recoil, for it pressed them back against the parapets of the Seine.

From the window, which commanded a view of the whole square, D'Artagnan saw with secret pleasure that the musketeers and guards who had got caught in the crowd were making room for themselves with the aid of fisticuffs and sword-hilts. He noticed also that, prompted by the *esprit de corps* which doubles the soldier's strength, they had managed to get together in a body of nearly fifty, and that, save a dozen stragglers here and there, they were now within reach of his voice. But it was not alone the musketeers and guards that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. Around the gibbets, particularly in the direction of the Arcade Saint-Jean, a clamorous, agitated crowd was whirling to and fro, apparently in a state of uncontrollable excitement. Many of the faces were stupid, many idiotic; but many of them were also daring and resolute, and among those who owned the latter, there were interchanges of signals, and hands were given and taken. In one of the most animated groups in this crowd D'Artagnan remarked the face of the cavalier he had seen enter the yard of the "*Image de Notre-Dame*" from the garden, and then go upstairs to harangue the drinkers. This man was organizing squads and giving orders.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I was not mistaken; I know the fellow; it 's Menneville. What the devil is he doing here?"

A dull, rumbling sound, which gradually grew stronger and stronger, put a stop to his conjectures and drew his eyes elsewhere. This murmur was occasioned by the arrival of the prisoners. A strong picket of archers preceded them and appeared at the corner of the arcade. The entire multitude then began a succession of yells, and all these yells formed one immense howl.

D'Artagnan saw that Raoul had turned pale; he slapped him roughly on the shoulder.

The fellows at the fire turned round when they heard the shouting, and asked how things were getting along.

"The prisoners have arrived," said D'Artagnan.

"Good," they answered, again piling more wood on the fire.

D'Artagnan stared at them uneasily. Evidently the men who could light a fire on such an occasion must have some strange purpose in view.

The prisoners advanced into the square; they were on foot and preceded by the executioner; fifty archers formed a hedge on each side of them. Both were clad in black; they were pale but firm. They looked impatiently over the heads of the crowd, standing on tiptoe to do so. This struck D'Artagnan as something very extraordinary.

"*Mordioux!*" he muttered, "I should n't think they would be so anxious to get a sight of their gibbets!"

Raoul drew back a little, but could not after all bring himself to leave the window. Terror also has its charms.

"Kill them! Kill them!" cried fifty thousand voices.

"Yes, yes, kill them!" howled back a group of a hundred men, apparently boiling over with fury.

"Give them the rope! the rope!" vociferated the mob. "*Vive le Roi!*"

"Queer!" muttered D'Artagnan, "I thought it was M. Colbert that had got them hanged, and not the King."

At this point the crowd was forced to fall back again, and the prisoners were obliged to halt.

The daring and resolute-looking fellows whom D'Artagnan had noticed, by dint of squeezing, pushing, and shoving had managed to come close up to the hedge of archers.

After a few moments the procession resumed its march.

Suddenly, with shouts of "Colbert forever!" the men whom D'Artagnan had not lost sight of for a single moment flung themselves on the escort, which made a vain effort to resist them. Behind these men was the crowd.

The uproar that ensued was terrible, but the confusion was more so. The yells that were heard now were no longer prompted by hope or joy; they were yells of pain. In fact, halberds were cracking skulls, swords were making holes in bodies, and muskets were already firing.

There was such a hurly-burly that D'Artagnan could not see anything. And then there was chaos, but a chaos brought about by evident design, by a clearly expressed volition.

The condemned men had been torn from their guards and were being dragged toward the tavern of the "*Image de Notre-Dame.*"

Those who dragged them were crying: "Colbert forever!"

The people hesitated, not knowing whether to fall on the archers or the archers' assailants.

The thing which puzzled the people was that those who began with shouting, "Colbert forever!" were at the same time shouting: "Down with the rope! down with the gibbet! Burn them, burn them, burn them! Burn the thieves! Burn the oppressors of the poor!"

At last, however, these cries aroused universal enthusiasm. The populace had come to witness an execution; now they were to have the chance of taking part in one themselves.

Nothing could please them better. So they took the side of the aggressors against the archers, and shouted, with what had once been the minority, but was now the most compact of majorities,

"Yes yes! burn them, the thieves! *Vive* Colbert!"

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "it looks as if this were getting serious."

One of the men who had been attending to the fire approached the window with a lighted brand in his hand.

"Oho!" said he, "things are getting warm."

Then turning to his comrade:

"That 's the signal!" he added.

And suddenly he applied the burning brand to a part of the woodwork.

Now the tavern of the "*Image de Notre-Dame*" was somewhat antiquated, and so, like a lady no longer in her first youth, was nothing loath to be set on fire. In a second the boards began to crackle, and the flames rose to the ceiling. The incendiaries shouted, and the howls of the mob outside responded.

D'Artagnan's whole attention was concentrated on the Place, and he noticed nothing in the room until the smoke was choking him and the flames were scorching him.

"Eh!" he cried, turning round; "setting the house on fire? Are you idiots or are you madmen, my masters?"

The two men stared at him in amazement.

"Why, was n't that to be the signal?" they asked.

"Give a signal by burning my house?" shouted D'Artagnan, tearing the brand from the incendiary's hand and dashing it in his face.

The second man ran to the help of his comrade; but Raoul seized him and flung him through the window, while D'Artagnan drove the other fellow down the stairs.

Raoul, who was the first to have his hands free, tore down the part of the wainscoting that was on fire and threw it into the room.

A glance told D'Artagnan that there was no further danger of a conflagration, and he ran back to the window.

The tumult was now at its height, and such cries as "Burn them!" "Hang them!" "Give them the rope!" "To the stake with them!" rose upon the air.

The men who had torn the prisoners from the hands of the archers were now quite close to the house, which was, apparently, the place to which they were dragging them.

Menneville was at their head, shouting louder than all the others:

"Burn them! burn the thieves! Hurrah for Colbert!"

D'Artagnan was beginning to understand. They were going to burn the two culprits and convert *his* house into a funeral pyre!

"Halt, there!" he cried, with sword in hand and with one foot planted on the window-sill. "Menneville, what is this you are about?"

"M. d'Artagnan," answered the latter, "get out of the way! out of the way at once!"

"Burn the robbers! Hurrah for Colbert!" howled the mob.

These cries infuriated D'Artagnan.

"*Mordioux!*" said he, "and all these poor devils have been condemned to is to be hanged! It's infamous!"

A large number of curious sightseers, having been driven back from the neighborhood of the scaffold, were now, however, packed close together in front of the tavern, and blocked up the entrance.

Menneville and his men had dragged their prisoners within ten yards of the door.

"Make room there!" he cried, levelling his pistol.

"Burn them, burn them!" repeated the mob. "There 's a fire at the '*Image de Notre-Dame.*' Burn the thieves! burn both of them in the '*Image de Notre-Dame*'!"

Doubt was no longer possible. It was D'Artagnan's house they aimed at.

D'Artagnan then recalled the old cry that had always rung from his lips with such potent effect.

"*À moi, mousquetaires!*" he shouted, with the voice of a

giant, one of those voices that override the roar of the cannon and the fury of the tempest; "*à moi, les mousquetaires!*"

And placing a hand on the railing of the balcony, he leaped over it and dropped among the crowd, which began to draw back from a house that seemed to be raining men.

Raoul was beside him in a second, both with swords drawn.

Every musketeer in the square heard the summons; they all turned round, recognized D'Artagnan, and shouted:

"The captain! The captain!"

The multitude opened before them as the sea does before the prow of a ship. At this moment D'Artagnan and Menneville were face to face.

"Clear the way! let us pass!" cried Menneville, who now had only to stretch out his arm to touch the door.

"You cannot pass here!" answered D'Artagnan.

"Then take that!" exclaimed Menneville, firing his pistol, which almost touched the musketeer's breast. But before the cock had dropped, D'Artagnan had struck up his arm with his sword-hilt and passed the blade through his body.

"You remember the time I advised you to behave yourself?" said D'Artagnan to Menneville, who rolled at his feet.

"Give way there!" cried Menneville's companions, at first dismayed, but quickly recovering their courage when they found they had only two men to deal with.

But these two men were like two hundred-handed giants. Their swords turned in every direction like the flaming glaive of the archangel. A cut here, a thrust there, and at every cut and thrust there fell a man.

"For the King!" cried D'Artagnan to every one he struck, and every one he struck lay stretched before him.

"For the King!" repeated Raoul.

This cry became the watchword of the musketeers, and guided them to where D'Artagnan was fighting.

Meanwhile, the archers, having recovered from their panic, charged the aggressors in the rear, overturning and knocking down all who opposed them with the regular sweep of mill-strokes.

At the sight of the gleaming swords and the drops of blood flying through the air, the crowd fell back, men tumbling over one another in their haste to escape.

At length nothing was heard save cries of despair and appeals for mercy — the last farewell of the vanquished

The archers resumed possession of their two prisoners. D'Artagnan approached the latter, whose faces were pale and despairing.

"You have at least the consolation, my poor fellows," said he, "of escaping the frightful tortures these ruffians intended to inflict on you. The King has only condemned you to be hanged, and hanged you shall be. There, string them up and have it over."

The "*Image de Notre-Dame*" was no longer in any danger. There was no water handy, but a couple of barrels of wine put out the fire quite as well. The conspirators escaped through the gardens. The archers hurried their prisoners to the scaffold.

When the two culprits were there, the business was soon finished. The hangman had very little care for the forms of art, and got through with the work in a minute.

In the meantime a number of persons gathered around D'Artagnan and were warm in their congratulations. He wiped his forehead, which was streaming with sweat, and his sword, which was streaming with blood. Seeing Menneville writhing in the convulsions of the last agony at his feet, he merely shrugged his shoulders. While Raoul turned away his head, pityingly, he pointed to the gibbets laden with their sad burdens, and said to the musketeers:

"Poor devils! they must have blessed me with their dying breath. What a terrible fate I saved them from, and in the nick of time, too!"

Menneville caught the words just as he was about to give up the ghost. A gloomy, ironical smile flickered on his lips. He tried to answer, but the threads of his life snapped in the effort. He expired.

"Oh! all this is too horrible!" exclaimed Raoul. "Let us get away, M. le Chevalier."

"You are not hurt?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"No, thank you."

"Well, *mordioux!* you are a gallant fellow, and no mistake; you have your father's brains and Porthos' arm. Ah! if he had only been here, Porthos would have seen something worth looking at!"

Then, as if suddenly struck by some recollection or other, he muttered:

"But where the devil can this honest Porthos of ours be?"

"Come, chevalier, come along with me," insisted Raoul.

"Just a minute until I get my thirty-seven and a half pistoles; then I'm yours. The house undoubtedly brings me a good income," added D'Artagnan, entering the "*Image de Notre-Dame*," "but decidedly I should prefer to have it in another quarter of the city, even if it brought me less."

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DIAMOND OF M. D'EYMERIS.

While this noisy and bloody scene was taking place on the Grève, several men, barricaded behind the door that communicated with the garden, were busy sheathing their swords and helping one of their number to mount a ready saddled horse which stood close by; then like a flock of scared birds they fled in all directions, some climbing the walls, others rushing through the gates on top of one another with all the ardor a panic is sure to inspire.

The man on horseback plunged the rowels into the animal's sides with such brutality that the poor beast almost cleared the wall. Then he dashed across the Place Baudoyer like lightning, trampling or overthrowing all in his way, and in ten minutes reached the superintendent's offices, more breathless even than his steed.

The Abbé Fouquet, the moment he heard the rattle of hoofs on the pavement of the courtyard, thrust his head out of the window.

"Well, Danicamp?" he shouted, even before the rider could throw himself off his horse.

"Well, all is over," answered Danicamp.

"Over!" cried the abbé; "they 're saved?"

"No, monsieur; hanged."

"Hanged!" repeated the abbé, turning pale.

A side door suddenly opened, and Fouquet appeared, livid, distracted, his lips half parted by a cry of grief and rage. He did not advance farther, but listened to the dialogue between the man in the yard and the man at the window.

"Wretches!" said the abbé, "so you did not even fight?"

"Yes, we did, like lions."

"Say rather like cowards."

"Monsieur!"

"In a surprise a hundred soldiers, real soldiers, ought to be worth ten thousand archers. Where is Menneville — that braggart, that swaggerer, who was to return either dead or victorious?"

"He kept his word, monsieur; he is dead."

"Dead! who slew him?"

"A demon in the shape of a man, a giant armed with ten flaming swords, a madman who at one stroke extinguished fire and riot, and summoned to his aid a hundred musketeers from beneath the pavement of the Place de Grève."

Fouquet raised his brow, all streaming with sweat, and murmured:

"Oh, Lyodot, D'Eymeris! Dead! dead! and I — dishonored! dishonored!"

The abbé turned round, and on seeing that his brother was utterly crushed:

"Come, come," said he, "it is fate's decree, monsieur. No use lamenting. If things have not fallen out as we expected, it is because God — "

"Silence, abbé, silence!" cried Fouquet. "Your excuses are blasphemies. Bid this man come up; I want to hear from his own lips the full details of this horrible event."

"But, brother — "

"Obey, monsieur!"

The abbé made a sign, and half a minute after, the man could be heard ascending the stairs.

At that moment Gourville appeared suddenly behind Fouquet, coming like his guardian angel, with finger on lip, warning him to keep cool, notwithstanding the excess of his sorrow.

The minister recovered all the serenity left at the disposal of a heart broken by affliction.

Danicamp appeared.

"Make your report," said Gourville.

"Monsieur," answered the messenger, "our orders were to carry off the prisoners and shout, 'Colbert forever!' while doing so — "

"And then burn them alive — was not that also part of their orders, M. l'Abbé?" interrupted Gourville.

"Yes! yes! the orders were given to Menneville, Menne-

ville knew what was expected of him, and Menneville is dead."

This intelligence appeared to reassure Gourville instead of grieving him.

"To burn them alive?" repeated the messenger, as if he were not quite certain that that portion of their instructions was intended to be executed.

"Most assuredly, to burn them alive," said the abbé, roughly.

"Of course, M. l'Abbé, of course," answered the messenger, scrutinizing the faces before him to find out what part of the truth it would be to his advantage or disadvantage to tell.

"Go on," said Gourville.

"The prisoners were then to be dragged to the Grève, where the people insisted on having them burned instead of hanged."

"The people are always right," said the abbé; "go on."

"But," resumed Danicamp, "at the very moment the archers had been driven back, at the very moment the house destined to serve as a stake for the execution of the criminals had caught fire, that demon, that madman, that giant of whom I have already spoken, — who was, we were told, the proprietor of the house in question, — aided by a young man he had with him, flung the men engaged in spreading the fire out of the window, shouted to the musketeers in the crowd, leaped from the first story into the square, and plied his sword in such desperate fashion that the fight turned in favor of the archers, the prisoners were retaken, and Menneville was slain. Three minutes afterwards the condemned men were executed."

Despite his self-control, Fouquet could not repress a hollow groan.

"And the name of this man, the proprietor of the house?" resumed the abbé.

"I cannot tell you, for I did not see him. My post was in the garden, and I remained at my post. What I tell you I heard from others. My orders were to bring you news of how the affair ended with the utmost speed. In pursuance of these orders, I galloped as fast as I could, and here I am."

"Very well, monsieur; that is all we had to ask you," replied the abbé, who had grown more and more downcast in proportion as the moment approached when he should have to be alone with his brother.

"Have you been paid?" inquired Gourville.

"Partly, monsieur," answered Danicamp.

"Here are twenty pistoles. You can now go, monsieur; but never forget that you must always be as ready to defend the true interests of the King as you were a while ago."

"Yes, monsieur," replied the messenger, bowing and thrusting the money into his pocket.

Then he passed out.

As soon as he had stepped across the threshold, Fouquet, who hitherto had not changed his position, advanced rapidly and stood between the abbé and Gourville.

Both of them opened their mouths at the same time to speak to him.

"No excuses," said he, "no recriminations against any one whatever. Had I not been a false friend, I should never have entrusted the task of saving Lyodot and D'Eymeris to others. I alone am guilty; I alone, then, deserve reproaches; I alone should suffer remorse. Leave me, abbé."

"But surely you will not prevent me from trying to find the rascal who managed, in the interest of M. Colbert, to ruin a scheme so well prepared?" answered the abbé. "If it is good policy to love and defend our friends, it is not, in my judgment, bad policy to pursue our enemies to the death."

"I will not have any of your policy, abbé. Leave me, if you please, and let me not hear of you until further orders. Silence and prudence must be our watchword for the present. You have a terrible example before you. No retaliations, gentlemen, I forbid it."

"I have no orders," grumbled the abbé, "that should prevent me from avenging on a rascal the insult he has offered my family."

"And I," returned Fouquet, in a voice so imperative as to leave no room for an answer, "will have you flung into the Bastille if you give expression to a single thought which is not the absolute expression of my will, two hours after that thought has been uttered. Act accordingly, abbé."

The abbé colored, and bowed.

Fouquet beckoned to Gourville to follow him, and both were proceeding to his cabinet, when the usher announced, in a loud voice.

"M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Who is he?" Fouquet asked Gourville, carelessly.

"An ex-lieutenant of his Majesty's musketeers," answered Gourville, in the same tone.

Fouquet did not trouble himself further about his visitor, and resumed his walk.

"I beg your pardon, monseigneur," continued Gourville, after a moment, "now that I recollect, this is an honest fellow who has left the King's service and is here, very likely, to collect a quarter's salary for something or other."

"Confound it!" replied Fouquet; "could he not have chosen his time better?"

"Allow me, then, to be the medium of refusing him. I know him, and he is the sort of man it would be better to have as a friend than as an enemy in present circumstances."

"Give him whatever answer you like," said Fouquet.

"Ah, in God's name!" cried the abbé, with all a churchman's rancor, "tell him there's no money, particularly for musketeers."

But these imprudent words were hardly spoken before the half-open door was thrown back, and D'Artagnan appeared.

"Oh, M. Fouquet," said he, "I was well aware there was no money for musketeers. So I did not come to have money offered me, but to have it refused. Thanks, that is all I wanted. Good-day, I will now go and ask M. Colbert for it."

And after a slight bow he passed out.

"Gourville," said Fouquet, "run after that man and bring him back."

Gourville obeyed, and joined D'Artagnan on the stairs.

Hearing steps behind him, D'Artagnan turned round and perceived Gourville.

"*Mordioux!*" said he, "you gentlemen of finance have queer manners. I visit M. Fouquet for the purpose of receiving a sum of money given me by his Majesty, and I am treated like a beggar asking alms, or a thief suspected of wanting to make away with a piece of plate."

"But you mentioned M. Colbert's name, dear M. d'Artagnan? You said you were going to see M. Colbert?"

"Certainly I am, though I had no other business than to ask him the meaning of people burning down houses to the cry of '*Vive Colbert!*'"

Gourville pricked up his ears.

"Oh!" said he, "you are alluding to what happened a while ago in the Grève?"

"Yes, certainly."

"But how did all that concern you, monsieur?"

"Concern me? M. Colbert was going to make a bonfire of my house, and you ask how did that concern me?"

"Your house — so it was your house they were going to burn?"

"I should think it was!"

"The '*Image de Notre-Dame*' is yours, then!"

"And has been for the last week."

"And you are the stout captain whose valiant sword scattered the mob that wanted to burn the prisoners?"

"My dear M. Gourville, just put yourself in my place. I am not only one of the guardians of the public peace, but I am a landlord. As a captain, it is my duty to see that the orders of the King are carried out; as a landlord, it is my interest to see that my own house is not burned down about my ears. I followed, then, the promptings of both duty and interest in handing over MM. Lyodot and d'Eymeris to the archers."

"So it was you who threw a man out of the window?"

"Myself," answered D'Artagnan, modestly.

"And killed Menneville?"

"I have been so unfortunate as to do so," said D'Artagnan, with the air of a person who is receiving a compliment.

"In a word, then, you are the cause of these two men being hanged?"

"Instead of burned; yes, monsieur, I am proud to say I am, I saved the poor devils from frightful torture. Only think of it, my dear M. Gourville! They wanted to burn them alive! It seems incredible!"

"Go, my dear M. d'Artagnan," said Gourville, anxious to spare Fouquet the sight of a man who had occasioned him such profound sorrow. "Go."

"No," said Fouquet, who had been listening at the door of the antechamber; "no, M. d'Artagnan; on the contrary, come in."

D'Artagnan wiped from the hilt of his sword a last bloody trace, which he had not remarked before, and turned back.

Then he met the eyes of these three men, each of whose faces wore a very different expression — an expression of rage on the abbé's, stupor on Gourville's, utter dejection on Fouquet's.

"Excuse me, M. le Surintendant," said D'Artagnan. "My time is limited; I have to go to the intendant's office in order to have an explanation with M. Colbert, and receive my quarter's salary."

"But, monsieur," answered Fouquet, "there is money here."

D'Artagnan stared at the superintendent in surprise.

"You have been answered rather lightly, monsieur, as I know, for I heard the answer," said the minister. "A man of your merit should be known by every one."

D'Artagnan bowed.

"You have an order?" added Fouquet.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Give me it, I will pay you myself; come along."

He made a sign to Gourville and the abbé, who remained behind, and took D'Artagnan with him into his cabinet.

"How much is due you, monsieur?" he asked.

"Oh, five thousand livres or thereabouts, monseigneur."

"Arrears of pay?"

"A quarter's pay."

"Amounting to five thousand livres?" inquired Fouquet, fixing a searching look on the musketeer. "Then the King gives you twenty thousand livres a year?"

"Yes, monseigneur, twenty thousand livres — you think it too much?"

"I think it too much!" exclaimed Fouquet, with a bitter smile. "If I were well acquainted with human nature; if I were prudent and vigilant, instead of being frivolous, inconstant, and vain; if, in short, I had the capacity certain people have of regulating my mode of life, you would receive from me, not twenty thousand livres a year, but a hundred thousand, and you would belong, not to the King, but to me!"

D'Artagnan colored slightly.

When praise is enhanced by the apparent sincerity and affection manifested in the voice of the eulogist, it becomes a sweet and subtle poison that sometimes intoxicates the most cool-headed.

The superintendent then opened a drawer, from which he took four rolls. He placed them before D'Artagnan.

The Gascon tore away part of the wrapper from one of them.

"Gold!" said he.

"It will be less of a burden to you, monsieur," answered the superintendent.

"But, monsieur, there are twenty thousand livres here."

"Undoubtedly."

"But I am owed only five."

"I wish to save you the trouble of making four visits to this office."

"You overwhelm me, monsieur."

"I have done what I ought to do, M. le Chevalier, and I hope you will not take offence at my brother's reception of you. His is a very surly and whimsical disposition."

"I assure you, monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "that any apology from you would pain me very much."

"Then I will not offer one, but content myself with asking a favor of you."

"Oh, monsieur!"

Fouquet drew from his finger a ring worth about a thousand pistoles.

"Monsieur," said he, "this stone was given me by a friend of my childhood, a man to whom you have done a great service."

Here Fouquet's voice faltered sensibly.

"A service!" exclaimed the musketeer, "a service to one of your friends?"

"You cannot have forgotten it, monsieur, for it was rendered by you on this very day."

"And the friend's name was?"

"M. d'Eymeris."

"One of the condemned?"

"One of the victims. Well, then, M. d'Artagnan, in return for the service you rendered him, I beg of you to accept this diamond. Do so for my sake."

"Monsieur —"

"Pray accept it. This day is for me a day of mourning. Later on you may, perhaps, learn why. To-day I lost a friend. Well, I am trying to find another."

"But, M. Fouquet —"

"Adieu, M. d'Artagnan, adieu!" cried Fouquet, almost unable to restrain his emotion, "or, rather, *au revoir!*"

And the minister passed hastily out of his cabinet, leaving the ring and the twenty thousand livres in the musketeer's hands.

"Oho!" muttered D'Artagnan, after meditating somewhat gloomily for a few moments; "can I see my way in all this? *Mordioux!* it's decidedly puzzling. But M. Fouquet is a thorough gentleman all the same. And now for my explanation with M. Colbert."

And he departed.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE NOTABLE DIFFERENCE DISCOVERED BY D'ARTAGNAN BETWEEN MONSIEUR AND MONSEIGNEUR.

M. Colbert lived in a house in the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs which had belonged to Beautru.

D'Artagnan's legs made the journey in less than a quarter of an hour.

The new favorite's courtyard was thronged with archers and police agents, who were there to congratulate him or to excuse themselves, according as he showed his disposition to praise or blame them. Flattery is an instinctive feeling in persons of low condition, as instinctive as is the sense of smell or hearing in wild beasts. These people, then, or their chief, felt that they had a chance of gaining M. Colbert's good graces by describing the manner in which his name was received during the late affray.

D'Artagnan made his appearance just at the moment the captain of the watch was giving in his report. He took his stand near the door, behind the archers.

The captain of the watch had induced Colbert to retire into a corner, somewhat against the latter's will.

"If you really desired, monsieur," said he, "that the people should do justice on the two traitors, you should have notified us beforehand; for though we should regret to displease you or run counter to your wishes, we had to execute our orders."

"You fool!" replied Colbert, furiously shaking his thick black hair, which resembled a mane, "do you know what you are saying? I conceive the idea of planning a riot? Are you drunk or mad?"

"But, monsieur, they all shouted, '*Vive Colbert!*'" answered the captain of the watch, nervously.

"A handful of conspirators —"

"No, no, an immense number of people."

"Ah!" said Colbert, looking pleased, "an immense number of people shouted, '*Vive Colbert*'? But are you quite sure of what you tell me, monsieur?"

"I had only to open my ears — though I felt more like closing them, the cries were so terrible."

"But did these cries come from the people, the *real* people?"

"Certainly, monsieur, the people who beat us were real enough."

"Very well," continued Colbert, pursuing the same train of thought. "Then you believe it was the people alone who wanted to burn the culprits?"

"Yes, monsieur, undoubtedly."

"Oh, that is a different matter. You made vigorous resistance?"

"We had three of our men choked to death, monsieur."

"And you killed nobody yourselves?"

"We laid a few of the rioters on the ground, among them a man of some note."

"Who was he?"

"A man named Menneville, upon whom the police have had their eye for a long time."

"Menneville!" cried Colbert, "the fellow who killed an honest fellow in the Rue de la Huchette for asking for a fat hen?"

"The same, monsieur."

"And did this Menneville also cry, '*Vive Colbert*'?"

"Louder than the rest — like a maniac."

A cloud passed over the intendant's brow, which became furrowed with wrinkles. The halo that encircled it was suddenly extinguished, like the light of those glow-worms we crush beneath our feet.

"Why did you say, then," asked the deceived financier, "that the shouts first came from the people? Menneville was my enemy. He knew well I would have had him hanged, could I have laid my hands on him. Menneville was a creature of the Abbé Fouquet — Fouquet was at the bottom of the whole business. Is it not known by every one that the culprits had been his friends from childhood?"

"True," thought D'Artagnan, "and now all my doubts are cleared up. Still, I repeat it, whatever else he may be, M. Fouquet is a thorough gentleman."

"And," continued Colbert, "are you quite sure that Menneville is dead?"

D'Artagnan believed the moment had now come to put in an appearance.

"Perfectly sure, monsieur," he answered, suddenly starting forward.

"Ah, it is you, monsieur?" said Colbert.

"Myself in person," replied the musketeer, in his usual deliberate tones. "It would seem Menneville was a nice little enemy of yours?"

"Not my enemy, monsieur," answered Colbert, "but an enemy of the King."

"Double-dyed idiot!" thought D'Artagnan; "to air your importance and hypocrisy for my benefit! Well!" he went on, "I am highly pleased at having done the King such good service. Would you have the kindness, M. l'Intendant, to bring the matter to his Majesty's notice?"

"What is the nature of the commission you are giving me, and what do you wish me to say, monsieur? Come to the point, please," rejoined Colbert, sourly, every tone of his voice already betraying his enmity.

"I have not given you any commission," returned D'Artagnan, with the calmness that never deserts the confirmed banterer. "I only thought it could not be much trouble for you to inform his Majesty that I had punished Menneville and restored order."

Colbert opened his eyes wide and questioned the chief of the watch with a look.

"Oh, this gentleman speaks the truth," said the latter, "he has been our savior."

"Why did you not tell me so at once, monsieur?" asked Colbert, spitefully. "All would then have been explained, and to your advantage more than to that of any one else."

"You are making a mistake, M. l'Intendant, I did not come to tell you so."

"Still, it was a remarkable exploit, monsieur."

"Oh," answered D'Artagnan, nonchalantly, "when one becomes accustomed to such exploits, they get to be something of a bore."

"To what, then, am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"To the fact, simply, that the King ordered me to call on you."

"Ah!" said Colbert, recovering all his composure when he perceived that the musketeer had drawn a paper from his pocket, "it is for money you have come?"

"Exactly, monsieur."

"Be good enough to wait until I am through with the report of the watch."

D'Artagnan turned rather insolently on his heel, and find-

ing that this movement brought him again face to face with Colbert, he saluted him, much as a harlequin might have done. Then, wheeling round a second time, he marched to the door with a firm step.

Colbert was struck with this intentional discourtesy, to which he was by no means accustomed. As a rule, the men of the sword who came to his office were in such want of money that though they had to wait till their feet were rooted to the floor, they would never have lost patience.

Would D'Artagnan go straight to the King? Would he complain of his rough reception, or would he relate his exploit? It was a matter for serious reflection.

At all events the moment was badly chosen for dismissing D'Artagnan, whether he came on the part of the King or on his own. The service the musketeer had rendered was of too recent date to be so soon forgotten. It occurred, therefore, to Colbert that his wisest plan was to lay aside his arrogance and recall D'Artagnan.

"Oh, M. d'Artagnan," he cried, "surely you are not leaving me in this fashion?"

D'Artagnan turned round.

"Why not?" he said quietly. "We have nothing more to say to each other, so far as I see."

"But you have, at least, to take your money, since you have an order for it?"

"I? Oh, not at all, my dear M. Colbert."

"But, monsieur, you have an order; and, just as you are always ready to give a thrust for the King whenever it is necessary, so I always pay whenever an order is presented to me. Present yours."

"It would be useless, my dear M. Colbert," said D'Artagnan, inwardly enjoying the confusion he had brought into the intendant's ideas; "the order is paid already."

"Paid! By whom, pray?"

"By the superintendent."

Colbert turned pale.

"Explain yourself," said he, hoarsely. "If you have been paid, why show me that paper?"

"In obedience to the order of which you spoke so ingeniously just now. The King sent me to receive a quarter of the amount he is pleased to allow me annually —"

"From me?" asked Colbert.

"Not exactly. The King said: 'Go to M. Fouquet; the superintendent will, perhaps, have no money; you will then go to M. Colbert.'"

Colbert's countenance cleared up for a moment; but his unfortunate physiognomy resembled a stormy sky, now as bright as the sun, now as black as the night, according as the lightning gleams or the cloud passes across it.

"You found the superintendent had money, did you?" he asked.

"Oh, money plenty enough," replied D'Artagnan. "At least, I have some reason for thinking so, as, instead of paying me the five thousand livres due me for the quarter — "

"Five thousand livres due you for the quarter!" cried Colbert, amazed, as, indeed, Fouquet himself had been, at the value set on the services of a mere soldier. "That would be at the rate of twenty thousand livres a year!"

"Correct, M. Colbert. Hang it, you count as well as the late lamented Pythagoras. Yes, twenty thousand livres."

"Ten times as much as an intendant of finance has! Allow me to congratulate you," said Colbert, with a venomous smile.

"Oh," returned D'Artagnan, "the King has apologized for the smallness of the amount; but he promised to make up for it later on, when he 's rich. But I must be off, I have many things to attend to —"

"Yes, yes. So, contrary to the King's expectation, the superintendent paid you?"

"Just as, contrary to the King's expectation, you have refused to pay me."

"I did not refuse, monsieur; I only requested you to wait. So you say M. Fouquet has paid you five thousand livres?"

"Yes, just what you say you would have done. And still — and still — he has even done better than that, dear M. Colbert."

"Why, what else has he done?"

"He has paid me the entire amount due me for the year, saying that his coffers were always full where the King was concerned."

"The entire amount! Paid you twenty thousand livres instead of five thousand?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And why?"

"Oh, to spare me the trouble of coming to his office three other

times. So I have my twenty thousand livres neatly and securely tucked up in my pockets. You see, then, I must bid you adieu, as I really don't need your aid, and have come here merely for form's sake."

And D'Artagnan slapped his pocket, with a laugh which revealed thirty-two magnificent teeth, as white as if they were only twenty-five years old, — teeth that seemed to be saying in their own language: "Serve us up thirty-two of your little Colberts and we'll eat them with a will!"

The serpent is as brave as the lion, the hawk is as valiant as the eagle: these are facts no one will contest. But even the so-called cowardly animals will fight when put on their defence. Colbert was not a bit afraid of D'Artagnan's thirty-two teeth. He summoned up all his dogged resolution and said:

"Monsieur, the superintendent has done what he had no right to do."

"What do you mean?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I mean that your note — show me the note, if you please."

"With the greatest pleasure; here it is."

The eagerness with which Colbert seized on the paper made D'Artagnan rather uneasy; he began to regret that he had let it out of his hands.

"Well, monsieur, the royal order says this: 'At sight, pay to M. d'Artagnan the sum of five thousand livres — the quarter of the amount which I grant him annually.'"

"Yes, so it reads," answered D'Artagnan, affecting a calmness he did not altogether feel.

"But the King owed you only five thousand livres; why should you have been given more than that?"

"Because I was given more; that's nobody's business but my own."

"It is natural," answered Colbert, with a sort of proud endurance, "that you should be ignorant of the laws of bookkeeping. But, monsieur, when you have a thousand livres to pay, what do you do?"

"I never have a thousand livres to pay."

"Yes," cried Colbert, irritably, "yes; but if you had a payment to make, would you not pay what you owed?"

"That only proves one thing: you have your own methods of bookkeeping, and M. Fouquet has his."

"Mine, monsieur, are the only correct ones."

"I 'm not denying it."

"And you have received what was not due you."

D'Artagnan's eyes flashed.

"What was not yet due me, you mean, M. Colbert. If I had received what was not due me at all, I should have committed a theft."

Colbert made no answer to this subtlety.

"Then you owe the treasury fifteen thousand livres," said he, carried away by his jealous zeal.

"Then give me credit for them," replied D'Artagnan, with just the slightest shade of irony.

"By no means, monsieur."

"What 's that you say? You 'll take away from me three of my rolls?"

"You 'll hand them over to my cashier."

"I? — Oh, don't reckon on my doing —"

"The King wants his money, monsieur."

"Does he, monsieur? Well, I want the King's money."

"Whether you do or not, you must restore it."

"Not a bit of it. I have always understood that in book-keeping, as you call it, a good cashier never gives back or takes back."

"Then, monsieur, we 'll see what the King will say when I show him this note. This note proves that M. Fouquet not only pays what he does not owe, but does not even keep the receipts for what he does pay."

"Ah, now I know why you took the paper from me, M. Colbert."

Colbert did not perceive fully that a threat lay under the tone in which his name was pronounced.

"You 'll see later on what use I am going to make of it," he retorted, holding up the paper in his fingers.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, snatching the paper from him with a quick gesture. "I see it already, M. Colbert, and so have no occasion to wait."

And he thrust the paper he had so nimbly got hold of into his pocket.

"Monsieur, monsieur!" exclaimed Colbert. "This violence —"

"Oh, nonsense! A man like you trouble himself about the manners of a rude soldier!" replied the musketeer. "My compliments to you, my dear M. Colbert!"

And he withdrew, laughing in the face of the future minister.

"That man," he muttered, "is sure to worship me some time or other. Pity we had to part company so soon."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEART AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEAD.

For a man who had been in so many dangerous situations, D'Artagnan's position with regard to Colbert was only comical. He did not deny himself the pleasure, then, of laughing at M. l'Intendant the whole way from the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards.

The distance is considerable; so the laughter of D'Artagnan was long and loud. He was still laughing when Planchet made his appearance at the door of his house, laughing also.

For Planchet, ever since his patron's return, above all ever since the apparition of the English guineas, spent the greater part of his life in doing what D'Artagnan had been doing between the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and the Rue des Lombards.

"So you've come at last, my dear master?" said Planchet.

"No, my friend," answered the musketeer, "I am going, and that as soon as possible, which means that I am first going to have supper, then going to bed, then going to sleep five hours, and then, at daybreak, going to jump into the saddle. Has my horse had an extra feed?"

"Why, my dear master," replied Planchet, "you know your horse is the darling of the house. My lads spend the whole day kissing him, and stuffing him with my sugar, nuts, and biscuits. You ask has he had a feed of oats? Ask rather whether he has not had enough to make him burst asunder ten times over."

"Good, Planchet, good. Now I pass to what concerns myself; what about the supper?"

"Ready; a smoking roast joint, white wine, crayfish, early cherries — something quite new, my master."

"You are the best of men, Planchet. To supper, then, and afterwards to bed."

During supper D'Artagnan noticed that Planchet rubbed his forehead repeatedly, as if to facilitate the escape of an idea which was very securely locked up in his brain. He gazed affectionately at this humble companion of his early trials, and clinking glass against glass:

"Come, now," said he, "friend Planchet, there is something you want to say to me, and you feel embarrassed about it. Speak out, man, speak frankly, *mordioux!*"

"Well, it's just this," answered Planchet; "it looks as if you were going on some expedition or other."

"I don't say you are wrong."

"You might n't have got some fresh idea in your head?"

"I might, Planchet."

"Then would there be a chance of risking some more capital on the venture? I 'm ready to stake fifty thousand livres on the idea you are thinking of working out." So saying, Planchet rubbed his hands together quickly and gleefully.

"Planchet," rejoined D'Artagnan, "there 's just one difficulty."

"And what might it be?"

"The idea is not mine — I cannot stake anything on it."

These words drew a heavy sigh from Planchet. Avarice is a bold adviser. She carries off her victim to the top of a high mountain, as Satan once carried Jesus, and, when she has shown him all the kingdoms of the earth, she can then take a rest; she knows that Envy, her inseparable companion, will stay behind and gnaw his heart.

Planchet had tasted of the wealth that is easily come by, and now it was impossible to set any limit to his desires. Still, since in spite of his covetousness he had a good heart, and since he adored D'Artagnan, he could not refrain from offering any number of suggestions and friendly warnings, all denoting the strongest affection.

He would not have been sorry, either, to get an inkling of the secret which his master was so successfully managing to keep to himself. But tricks and traps and insidious counsels were all ineffective; D'Artagnan did not take him into his confidence.

In this fashion the evening flew by. After supper D'Artagnan was busy with his portmanteau. Then he went to the stable, petted his horse, and saw to the animal's legs and shoes. Next, after carefully counting over his money, he went

to bed, closed his eyelids five minutes after he had put out the lamp, sleeping as soundly as when he was twenty, because he had neither anxiety nor remorse.

And yet there were many circumstances that might have kept him awake. His brain was seething with thought, was overflowing with conjectures, for D'Artagnan was a great drawer of horoscopes. But with that imperturbable coolness which contributes more than genius does to the good fortune and prosperity of men of action, he quietly put aside reflection until the morrow; not being, he said to himself, clear-headed enough to indulge in it at the moment.

At length it was daylight. The Rue des Lombards had its share of the caresses of rosy-fingered Aurora, and D'Artagnan felt that, like Aurora, he should rise also.

He did not awaken anybody. He went downstairs, his portmanteau under his arm, without making a single one of the steps creak, without disturbing a single one of the sonorous snores that reverberated from garret to basement. Then, after saddling his horse, and closing the stable and the shop, he started, at a walking pace, on his expedition to Bretagne.

He had, indeed, acted wisely in not allowing his mind to dwell, the night before, on all the political and diplomatic affairs that solicited his attention; for his ideas unfolded with far more clearness and in far more abundance in the soft cool twilight that encompassed him.

On passing in front of Fouquet's mansion, he threw into the yawning orifice of the box in front of the gate that delightful money order which, on the evening before, he had such difficulty in wresting from Colbert's claws.

Placed in an envelope and addressed to Fouquet, its nature had not even been divined by Planchet, who in matters of divination could have given points to Calchas or to the Pythian Apollo.

D'Artagnan, then, returned the order to Fouquet, without either compromising himself or having any grounds on which to reproach himself. When he had made this very laudable restitution, he thus communed with himself:

"Now let us inhale a good supply of the air of daybreak, adding thereto much freedom from care and a fair provision of health. Let us also breathe our steed whose flanks swell out as if he would suck in the whole atmosphere, and let us be very ingenious in our little calculations.

"It were time," he continued, "to draw up a plan of campaign; but, before doing so, we must imitate M. de Turenne, who has a very big head, full of all prudent devices, and sketch an accurate portrait of the hostile generals we are to confront.

"Presently starts up before us M. Fouquet. Who is M. Fouquet?

"M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, giving an answer to his own question, "is a handsome man, much loved of ladies; a munificent man, much loved of poets; an enlightened man, much detested of knaves.

"I am neither woman nor poet nor knave; I, therefore, neither love nor hate M. le Surintendant; I am, therefore, absolutely in the same position in which M. de Turenne was when the question before him was to win the battle of the Dunes. He did not hate the Spaniards, but he made a clean sweep of them, all the same.

"No, I am in a better position than that, *mordioux!* I am in the same position M. de Turenne was in when he encountered the Prince de Condé at Jargeau, Gien, and the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. He did not hate the prince, but he obeyed the King. The prince is charming, but the King is the King. Turenne heaved a sigh, called Condé 'my cousin,' and scattered his army to the winds.

"Now, what does the King wish? None of my business.

"Now, what does M. Colbert wish? Oh, that 's another matter. M. Colbert wishes for everything that M. Fouquet does not wish for.

"Then, what does M. Fouquet wish for? Hum! That 's serious; M. Fouquet wishes for everything that the King wishes for."

The soliloquy over, D'Artagnan laughed, while he made his whip whistle in the air. He was now riding along the highway, scaring the birds in the hedges, listening to the louis dancing in his leather pocket at every movement, and it must be confessed that, in such circumstances, excessive tenderness was not the ruling vice of D'Artagnan.

"After all," said he, "I cannot look on this expedition as very dangerous. I suspect this journey will turn out like the play General Monk took me to see in London: it will be 'Much Ado About Nothing.'"

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE JOURNEY.

It was perhaps the fifth time since the day when our story opened that this man with the heart of bronze and sinews of steel had left home and friends, everything, in short, to go in quest of fortune and death. Death had constantly recoiled at sight of him, as if afraid; but it was only during the past month that fortune and he had become allies.

Although he was not a great philosopher, after the style of Sophocles or Epicurus, his was a powerful mind, gifted with the knowledge of life, and the sagacity to apply that knowledge practically.

But no man can be as brave, adventurous, and quick-witted as was D'Artagnan without at the same time being something of a dreamer. He had picked up here and there a few scraps of M. de la Rochefoucauld, scraps well worthy of being turned into Latin verse by the gentlemen of Port-Royal, and he had also made a collection of fragments of Seneca and Cicero, translated and applied to the affairs of ordinary life by his friends Athos and Aramis.

The contempt of riches which our Gascon held as an article of faith during the first thirty-five years of his life had been regarded by him for a long time as the first article in the code of bravery as well.

"Article 1," he used to say; "A man is brave, because he has nothing. A man has nothing, because he despises riches."

Holding these principles for thirty-five years, as we have said already, D'Artagnan had no sooner become rich than he felt it a duty to ask himself if he were still brave, in spite of his riches.

Any one except D'Artagnan would have thought the incident in the Place de Grève should have been sufficient answer, an answer that would have satisfied the conscience of most people. But D'Artagnan was brave enough to ask himself sincerely and conscientiously if he were brave.

And he found an answer.

"Really, the way in which I drew my sword and cut and

thrust on the Grève ought to banish all doubt as to my bravery."

But to this there came up another answer:

"Softly, Master Captain! that's no answer at all. You were brave on that day because they were burning your house, and I would bet a thousand to one that if these honest rioters had not got that unfortunate idea into their skulls, their plan of attack would have succeeded, or at least, you would have done nothing to prevent it.

"But what am I likely to lose in Bretagne? I have no house there to be burned, nor treasure to be deprived of.

"No, but I have my skin! D'Artagnan's priceless skin, worth all the houses and treasures in the world, that skin which I value above anything on earth, because it is, to tell the truth, the covering of a body which covers a heart which is a very warm heart, well pleased to feel itself beating, and, therefore, living.

"*Ergo*, I desire to live. Now, I have been living far more fully, far more completely, than ever before since I have become rich. What idiot was it said money ruins a man's life? No such thing, upon my soul! On the contrary, if I know myself, I now absorb a double portion of air and sunlight. *Mordioux!* how must it be with me, then, if I double my wealth, and if, instead of the switch in my hand, that hand bear a marshal's baton? When that happens, I'm afraid there will not be a sufficient supply of air and sunshine in the universe for my needs.

"And this is not a dream, either. Why the devil should not the King make me a duke and marshal, when his father, Louis XIII., made Albert de Luynes a duke and constable? Am I not far cleverer than that idiot De Vitry and quite as brave?

"Ah, but that's just the stumbling-block in the way of my advancement: I am too clever.

"Luckily, there is such a thing as justice in this world, and fortune has been decidedly in arrears in my case. Surely she owes me something for all I did for Anne of Austria, and full compensation for all Anne of Austria did not do for me!

"Then, at last I am on good terms with a king, and with a king who somehow looks as if he were resolved to reign. God keep him in that glorious resolution! For if he is resolved to reign, he'll need me; and if he need me, he'll

have to give me what he promised: plenty of room and warmth and light. Well, if I view the matter comparatively, I am now where I was formerly — on the way from nothing to everything. The only little difference is this: the nothing of to-day used to be the everything of yesterday.

"And now let me see what part the heart — I was speaking of it just now — has in all this.

"But — I was speaking of my heart from memory, I think I remember I had one."

And the Gascon pressed his hand against his breast as if to feel whether there might not be a heart somewhere about there.

"Ah, wretch!" he murmured, with a bitter smile. "Ah, poor human creature! didst think thou hadst no heart? and lo! thou hast one! What a blundering courtier thou art! nay, worse, a disaffected rebel! Thou hast a heart — and it speaks to thee in favor of M. Fouquet.

"But what is M. Fouquet in connection with the King? A conspirator, a genuine conspirator, who does not even try to conceal the fact that he conspires. Consequently, what a weapon couldst thou not use against him, if his gracious kindness and his remarkable ability did not become a sort of sheath for that weapon.

"Armed rebellion! — for that is the very thing M. Fouquet is engaged in. So, when the King suspects M. Fouquet of plotting a rebellion in secret, I know differently, I can prove that M. Fouquet has shed the blood of his Majesty's subjects.

"Now let us come to the point — I know this, and yet I hold my tongue. What more does this tender heart of mine want in return for those kindly acts of M. Fouquet, the advance of fifteen thousand livres, the diamond worth a thousand pistoles, and the smile in which there was as much bitterness as benevolence? So far I am saving his life.

"Now, I hope," continued the musketeer, "that this simpleton of a heart will shut its mouth, seeing that ample amends have been made to M. Fouquet.

"And since ample amends have been made to M. Fouquet, and since the King is my sun, woe to him who shall stand between me and my sun! So forward, then, for his Majesty Louis XIV., forward!"

These meditations alone could retard the progress of D'Ar-

tagnan. So when they were concluded he pushed forward more rapidly. But however perfect his steed might be, Zephyr could not keep on going forever. Therefore the day after our musketeer started from Paris he consigned his horse to the care of an innkeeper at Chartres, an old-time friend of D'Artagnan.

Then he hired post horses. Thanks to this mode of locomotion, it did not take him much time to go from Chartres to Châteaubriand.

This last city is so remote from the coast that no one would ever think of suspecting that D'Artagnan wanted to go toward the sea, and so remote from Paris that no one would ever think of suspecting he came from there. For these reasons the messenger of Louis XIV., who had styled that monarch his sun, never dreaming the French King — at present a rather second-rate little star in the sky of royalty— would one day select that luminary as his emblem, — the messenger of Louis XIV., we repeat, gave up posting and bought a nag, a sorry-looking beast that no cavalry officer would ever care to incur the disgrace of riding.

Except for the color, the new purchase reminded D'Artagnan of the famous orange horse with which, or rather upon which, he had made his first entry into the world of action.

True, the D'Artagnan that bestrode the new charger was no longer the D'Artagnan with whom we have been acquainted, but a substantial citizen, clad in a gray jerkin and maroon breeches, something between a priest and a layman; what gave him a touch of the former was the threadbare skullcap wherewith he had endued his cranium, and the broad-brimmed hat that surmounted the skullcap. There was no sword; a good stick tied to his forearm by a cord supplied its place; but an excellent dagger, twelve inches long, was stowed away under his cloak, ready to make its appearance in sudden emergencies.

The nag bought at Châteaubriand completed the difference. It was called, or, rather, D'Artagnan called it, Furet (*Ferret*).

"If I have transformed Zephyr into Furet," said D'Artagnan, "there is no reason why I should not curtail my own appellative.

"Then, instead of D'Artagnan, why not squeeze it into

Agnan? The abridgment is demanded by my gray coat, my round hat, and my threadbare skullcap."

So M. Agnan jogged along on Furet, without having to complain of any unpleasant jars; and Furet, though a horse that had long lost all self-conceit, did his twelve leagues gayly, for all that, thanks to four spindle-shanks whose wariness and self-possession the trained eye of D'Artagnan had appreciated at a glance.

On the way our traveller took notes, studied the austere and cold country he was traversing, and all the time was racking his brains for some plausible pretext that might enable him to visit Belle-Isle-en-Mer and see everything without arousing suspicion.

His meditations brought home to him the importance of the object in view the nearer he drew toward it.

In this out-of-the-way country, in this ancient duchy of Bretagne, which was not then French at all, and is hardly French now, the people knew nothing of the King of France. Not only did they know nothing of him, but they wished to know nothing of him.

For them one fact only floated visibly on the current of political life: their ancient dukes no longer governed them; a certain seat was empty, that was all. But in place of a sovereign duke, the seigneurs of the parishes ruled them with undisputed sway. And above these seigneurs was God, who has never been forgotten in Bretagne.

Now, of all these suzerains of castles and churches, the most powerful, wealthy, and popular was Fouquet, Seigneur de Belle-Isle. Even in his own country, even in sight of his island, there were marvellous legends and traditions about him.

Not everybody cared to enter this island, which was as long as it was broad, six miles either way. It had once belonged to De Retz, and that horrifying name had made people keep rather shy of it for many a year.

Belle-Isle had passed into the hands of the Fouquet family shortly after its erection into a marquisate by Charles IX. The celebrity of the isle was not a thing of yesterday; its name in its Greek form could be traced to the most remote antiquity. The ancients called it Kalonesos, which means beautiful isle.

Thus for nearly two thousand years previously it had borne in another tongue the name it still bears.

So this possession of the superintendent had a certain importance of its own, apart from its position of six leagues off the coast of France, a position that made it lord of its maritime solitude, like some majestic ship that disdains the shelter of the haven and proudly casts its anchors in the very middle of the ocean.

All this information D'Artagnan absorbed without seeming in the least degree surprised. He also learned that the best place for embarking was La Roche-Bernard, a rather considerable town at the mouth of the Vilaine. If he could not embark there, he might cross the salt marshes, go to Guérande or Le Croisic, and wait for an opportunity to pass over to the island. He was not unwilling to make the journey, for ever since he had left Châteaubriand it had been clear to him that there was nothing which M. Agnan could not make Furet do, and nothing, on the other hand, which Furet could not make easy for M. Agnan to do.

He prepared, then, to make his supper off a widgeon and a game-pie in a hotel in La Roche-Bernard, and ordered cider from his host's cellar to wash it down, which, the moment he tasted it, told him that a Breton beverage was even more Breton than a Breton dish.

CHAPTER LXVII.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A POET WHO HAD INSURED THE PUBLICATION OF HIS POEMS BY BECOMING HIS OWN PRINTER.

Before sitting down to table D'Artagnan, as usual, had kept his eyes about him. But one of the axioms of the inquisitive is that if you wish your questions to bear abundant fruit, you must first show yourself ready to be questioned. D'Artagnan, then, looked round the hostelry with his customary watchfulness for the sort of questioner that might serve his turn.

Now, on the first story were two travellers quite as busy as he was with preparations for supper or for the supper itself. D'Artagnan had seen their horses in the stable and their luggage in the hall.

One of them had a lackey, and was evidently a person of some consequence; his two handsome, well-groomed Perche mares showed this also.

The other was of a common sort, very thin, wearing a dusty overcoat, linen, that had seen better days, and boots maltreated by the pavement rather than by the stirrup. He had come from Nantes in a wagon drawn by a horse so like Furet in color, that if D'Artagnan had wanted a match for a team he could not have found a better, though he travelled a hundred leagues. The wagon contained a number of bulky parcels wrapped up in some old stuff or other.

"This traveller," D'Artagnan said to himself, "is just the thing. He suits me to a T. I must try and be equally agreeable to him. M. Agnan, of the threadbare skullcap and gray jerkin, is not too plebeian to sup with the gentleman of the aged boots and the aged horse."

Which said, D'Artagnan summoned his host and commanded him to carry widgeon and game-pie and cider to the chamber of the gentleman of the modest exterior. He himself preceded the innkeeper up the wooden staircase with a plate in his hand, and knocked at the door.

"Come in," said a voice.

D'Artagnan entered, with the plate now under his arm, his hat in one hand, his candle in the other, and a seductive smile on his lips.

"Monsieur," said he, "excuse me. I am, like yourself, a traveller; I know no one in the hotel, and I have got into the bad habit of getting terribly bored when I have to eat by myself; in such circumstances the repast seems to me wretched, and never does me any good. I saw your face just now when you came down to open some oysters, and I liked it exceedingly. Besides, I noticed that you had a horse the exact image of mine, and that our host, doubtless struck by the resemblance, placed them side by side in his stable, where they appear to be getting along together marvellously. I do not see, then, when the horses are so close together, why their masters should be apart. Consequently I have come to ask the favor of being admitted to your table. My name is Agnan, Agnan, at your service, monsieur, the unworthy steward of a wealthy seigneur who intends purchasing certain salt marshes in the neighborhood and has sent me to visit his future property. In good sooth, monsieur, I only hope my face pleases you as much

as yours does mine, for I wish, in all courtesy, to be entirely yours."

The stranger, whom D'Artagnan now saw for the first time, — he had barely caught a glimpse of him before, — had dark, sparkling eyes, a yellow complexion, a forehead somewhat furrowed by the weight of fifty years, features that on the whole expressed good nature, but a considerable degree of cunning as well.

"It looks," thought D'Artagnan, "as if this blade never worked any part of his body except the upper part of his head — the eyes and the brain. He must be a man of science, for I can tell absolutely nothing from his mouth, chin, and nose."

"Monsieur," replied the person with whose ideas and appearance D'Artagnan was taking such liberties, "you do me a great honor; not that I ever get bored," he added, smiling, "for I always have company with me that amuses me satisfactorily. Still, I am pleased to meet you."

But while uttering these words, the man with the dilapidated boots cast an uneasy glance at the table from which the oysters had disappeared, all that was left being a small piece of bacon.

"Monsieur," D'Artagnan hastened to say, "our host is bringing up a rather nice-looking roast fowl and a superb game-pie."

Rapid as had been the stranger's glance, D'Artagnan caught it and read therein alarm at an attack by a possible parasite. His surmise was correct, for these words dispelled the cloud that was settling on the face of the man of the modest exterior.

And, indeed, at that very instant the innkeeper, as if he had been watching for the favorable moment, entered with the promised dishes. The widgeon and game-pie were added to the broiled bacon; D'Artagnan and his new comrade bowed, sat down opposite each other, and, like two brothers, shared the bacon and the other dishes.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must allow that there is nothing in the world so wonderful as the results of combination."

"How so?" asked the stranger, his mouth full.

"Well, I am going to tell you," answered D'Artagnan.

The stranger gave a respite to his jaws, that he might listen the more attentively.

"In the first place," continued D'Artagnan, "instead of one candle we have two; you can see so for yourself."

"True," assented the stranger, struck by the extreme cogency of this observation.

"Then, I see that you eat my game-pie in preference, while I prefer your bacon."

"True again."

"And, to cut the matter short, there is the pleasure of your society, which I place above that of having more light and eating what we each prefer."

"Upon my word, you are a jovial person, monsieur," said the stranger, pleasantly.

"Oh, yes, monsieur; jovial, like every fellow that has n't much in his head. That is n't your case, though, I can see, monsieur," pursued D'Artagnan. "I can read all sorts of genius in your eyes."

"Oh! monsieur — "

"Come, now, confess."

"What?"

"You are a scholar."

"Oh, as for that, monsieur — "

"Oh, now — "

"Well, perhaps."

"'Perhaps' indeed! Nonsense!"

"I am an author."

"There!" cried D'Artagnan, clapping his hands in an ecstasy, "I was not mistaken! It looks almost miraculous!"

"Monsieur — "

"What glory!" continued D'Artagnan. "I shall have the felicity of spending to-night in the company of an author — a celebrated author, very likely?"

"Oh, as for celebrated, monsieur," said the unknown, blushing, "celebrated is hardly the word — "

"Modest!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, in transports; "he is modest!"

Then addressing the stranger, in a tone of blunt good-fellowship:

"Tell me at least the name of your works, monsieur," said he, "for you will notice you have n't told me your own, and I had to give a guess myself as to the kind of man you are."

"My name is Jupenet, monsieur," answered the author.

"And a fine name it is! a fine name, upon my word! and something tells me — excuse me if I am in error — that I have heard that name spoken of somewhere or other."

"I have written verses, monsieur."

"Ah, that 's it! they were read to me."

"And a tragedy."

"Yes, yes, I saw it acted."

The poet blushed a rosier red.

"I do not think so," said he, "for my verses have not been printed."

"Ah, then, it 's from seeing the tragedy I learned your name."

"Wrong again, monsieur, for the gentlemen of the company of the Hôtel de Bourgogne would have nothing to do with it," answered the poet, with one of those smiles of which only certain sorts of pride possess the secret.

D'Artagnan bit his lips.

"So you see, monsieur," continued the poet, "that you are altogether mistaken in my regard, and that, as I am totally unknown to you, you cannot have heard of me."

"I am really puzzled, I thought I had. Still, the name of Jupenet seems to me quite as fine and quite as deserving of being known as the names of Corneille, Rotrou, or Garnier. I hope, monsieur, you will be kind enough to recite a little of your tragedy — later on, of course, at dessert. It will be the sweets after the solids, *mordioux!* Ah! excuse me, monsieur! That oath escaped me because I am always in the habit of hearing it on the lips of my lord and master. I take the liberty of occasionally borrowing it because it seems to be a genteel kind of oath. Of course I never use it except in his absence, as you can well understand, for if I were to use it in his presence —! But in good truth, monsieur, this cider is abominable. Do you not agree with me? And besides, the pot is shaped so awkwardly that it won't stand on the table."

"What if we were to steady it?"

"All right; but with what?"

"With this knife."

"Ah! but in that case, what are we to carve the widgeon with? Or perhaps you do not care to touch it?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

"Well, then —"

"Wait."

The poet rummaged in his pocket and drew out a little quadrangular piece of metal, an inch and a half in length and with scarcely any width at all.

But no sooner had this metallic object seen the light of day than the poet made a movement to thrust it back into his pocket, as if, apparently, he had been guilty of an imprudence. D'Artagnan saw all this; he was a man whom nothing escaped. He stretched out his hand in the direction of the piece of metal.

"Stay," said he, "that's a pretty-looking little thing you have there. May I see it?"

"Certainly," answered the poet, as if he had yielded too readily to his first impulse; "certainly you may see it. But," he added, with an air of assurance, "there is no use of your looking at it. You would never guess its purpose unless I told you."

D'Artagnan had felt that there was something worth inquiring into about the hesitation of the poet at first and his eagerness to conceal the metallic object he had accidentally taken from his pocket. Therefore, his attention being once awakened on this point, all that circumspection which gave him the upper hand on every occasion was awakened also. Besides, notwithstanding what M. Jupenet had asserted, a glance at the object in question told him what it was. It was a metallic printing-letter.

"Do you guess what it is?" inquired the poet.

"I? Oh, no, not at all," answered D'Artagnan.

"Well, monsieur, this little article is a printing-letter."

"Pshaw!"

"A capital."

"You're not laughing at me?" said M. Aguan, his artless eyes almost jumping out of his head.

"Fact. A capital J, the first letter of my name."

"So it's really a letter?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You don't say so! Well, I was going to confess —"

"What?"

"Oh, no, I can't; you'd think it so stupid."

"Not at all, don't be afraid," rejoined Maître Jupenet, condescendingly.

"Well, I don't understand, if that be a letter, how you can make a word of it."

"A word?"

"Yes, a word to be printed."

"The easiest thing in the world."

"Really?"

"This interests you?"

"Enormously."

"Then I'll explain it. Listen."

"I'm all attention."

"I'll make the thing clear in a jiffy."

"Good!"

"Look closely."

"I am looking."

And in fact, D'Artagnan appeared to have his whole mind on the subject. Jupenet drew seven or eight other printing-letters of a smaller size from his pocket.

"A-a-h!" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"What's the matter?"

"You have a whole printing-press in your pocket, then? Hang me if I have ever seen anything so curious!"

"Yes, it is rather curious."

"Heavens! what a lot of things a little travelling teaches a fellow!"

"Your health," said Jupenet, enchanted.

"Here's yours in return, *mordioux!* But hold on. Not in this cider. It's abominable and unworthy of a man who quaffs at the fountain of Hippocrene. Is that not the name you poets give your fountain?"

"Yes, monsieur, you are right, such is the name of our fountain. It comes from two Greek words, *hippos*, which means a horse — and — and —"

"Monsieur," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you shall drink with me a liquor that comes from a single French word and is n't the worse on that account, the word '*grape*.' This cider at once makes me shrink and makes me swell. With your permission, I will ask our host if he has a few decent bottles of Beaugency or Céran stacked behind the big bins of his cellar."

The host had heard our musketeer and was already climbing the stairs.

"Monsieur," broke in the poet, "we must look out. Unless

we hurry, we shall not have time to drink your wine. I must take passage on the boat that starts at the next turn of the tide."

"What boat?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"The boat that leaves for Belle-Isle."

"Ah! For Belle-Isle?" said the musketeer. "Good!"

"Bah! there 's plenty of time, gentlemen," put in the host, uncorking a bottle. "The boat does n't sail for an hour yet."

"But who will notify me of the time?" asked the poet.

"Your neighbor in the next apartment."

"Why, I hardly know him."

"When you hear him leaving it will be time for you to leave."

"So he is going to Belle-Isle also?"

"Yes."

"The gentleman with the lackey?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"The gentleman with the lackey."

"A person of rank, I suppose?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know, you say?"

"Yes. All I know is that he drinks the same wine you do."

"*Mordioux!* what an honor for us!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, pouring out a bumper for his companion while the landlord was retiring.

"So," resumed the poet, going back to the ideas that had taken hold of him, "you never saw any one printing?"

"Never."

"I 'll show you. You take the letters that compose a word, thus: A B; next, here is an R, two E's, then a G."

And he arranged the letters with a skill and quickness that did not escape the notice of D'Artagnan.

"*Abrégé*," said he as he finished.

"Capital!" cried D'Artagnan; "I see all the letters gathered together; but how are they kept in position?"

And he poured out a second glass for his guest.

M. Jupenet smiled, like a man who has an answer for everything. Then he drew, also, from his pocket a little metal ruler, made up of two parts like a carpenter's rule, against which he put the printing-letters in a line, holding them under his left thumb.

"Pray, what is the name of that little iron rule?" inquired D'Artagnan; "for a name I presume it must have."

"It is called a composing-stick," said Jupenet. "It helps to form the lines."

"Well, now I can surely maintain what I said: you have a printing-press in your pocket," returned D'Artagnan, laughing with such an air of childlike simplicity that the poet was completely his dupe.

"No," replied the author, "but I am too lazy to write, and when a verse gets into my head, I arrange it at once for printing. So I have only half the work to do."

"*Mordioux!*" thought D'Artagnan, "this must be looked into."

And, under some pretext or other, — our musketeer was never at a loss to find one, for he was fertile in expedients, — he rose from the table, ran downstairs, made for the shed under which stood the little wagon, and prodded with his dagger the covering of one of the parcels. He found it was full of printing-letters exactly like the ones the poet-printer had in his pocket.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan; "I don't know yet whether M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle materially; but it is pretty plain he is providing his château with a good store of intellectual ammunition."

Then, enriched by his discovery, he returned to his place at the table.

D'Artagnan now knew what he wanted to know. For all that, he continued in his seat, opposite his companion, up to the very moment a noise was heard in the neighboring apartment, which from its nature denoted that their neighbor was leaving.

At once the printer was on his feet. He had already given orders that his horse should be put to. His vehicle was waiting for him at the door. The second traveller and his lackey were mounting on horseback.

D'Artagnan followed Jupenet as far as the harbor, where the poet embarked his wagon and horse on board the boat.

His more wealthy fellow-traveller did the same with his two mares and his lackey. But all the efforts of D'Artagnan to learn the name of this gentleman were in vain.

He made such a thorough inspection of his face, however, that that face remained forever engraved on his memory.

D'Artagnan had an ardent longing to embark with the two passengers; but an interest more powerful than that of curiosity drove him back from the shore to the hostelry.

He returned sighing, and went to bed immediately, so as to be up early the next morning with fresh ideas and the clear vision which the counsel of the night brings with it.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

D'ARTAGNAN CONTINUES HIS INVESTIGATIONS.

At daybreak D'Artagnan saddled Furet, who had made the best of cheer during the night, having devoured all the provisions left behind by his two comrades.

The musketeer got all he could out of the innkeeper, but found him crafty, distrustful, and devoted body and soul to Fouquet. It was the more necessary, therefore, in order not to arouse the fellow's suspicions, to keep to his story about the probable purchase of certain salt-pits. To embark for Belle-Isle at La Roche-Bernard would be the surest way to confirm the reports that very likely had already been spread concerning him, and make it certain that these reports would be brought to the château.

Moreover, it was rather singular that D'Artagnan should not be able to learn anything about the traveller with the lackey, in spite of all the questions he put to his host, who seemed to be very well acquainted with him.

The musketeer then made inquiries as to the position of the salt-pits and took his way to the marshes, leaving the sea on his right and pushing on into that vast, desolate plain which resembles a sea of mud, with little rolling hillocks rising here and there, silvered with crests of salt.

Furet picked his steps wonderfully with his little sinewy feet over the causeways — not more than a foot in width — that separate the salt-pits. D'Artagnan, safe from a stumble and the resulting cold water bath, let his horse have his way, and gave all his attention to the three pointed rocks that rose above the horizon out of the sterile plain.

Pirial, and the hamlets of Batz and Le Croisic, all exactly

alike, attracted his observation. If our traveller turned round, the better to see where he was going, he beheld on the other side of the horizon the three spires of Guérande, Le Poulighen, and Saint-Joachim, somewhat in the position of a set of skittles, of which he and Furet were the wandering ball.

The first little haven on his right was Pirial. He started for it, with the names of its chief saltmakers on his lips.

Just as he entered the town, he noticed that three bulky lighters were leaving, laden with stone.

It struck D'Artagnan as remarkable that stone should be exported from a country that has none. Nothing but a recourse to M. Agnan's bland affability could solve this enigma.

An aged fisherman, in response to M. Agnan, said that the stone did not come from Pirial, nor from the marshes, either, as any one could see.

"Then where does it come from?" inquired the musketeer.

"It comes, monsieur, from Nantes and Paimboeuf."

"And where does it go to?"

"To Belle-Isle, monsieur."

"Ah! really!" returned D'Artagnan, in the same tone in which he told the printer how much he was interested in his printing-letters; "so there's building going on at Belle-Isle?"

"Why, of course, monsieur! M. Fouquet has the walls of his château repaired every year."

"It's in ruins, then?"

"It is very old."

"Ah, thank you."

"The fact is," said D'Artagnan to himself, "nothing is more natural. Every proprietor has the right to make what repairs he likes on his property. Fortifications, indeed! Suppose some one were to tell me I was fortifying the '*Image de Notre-Dame*,' every time I had to repair it! In good truth, I believe his Majesty has been listening to false reports and that he is altogether mistaken."

"You must confess," he continued aloud, addressing the fisherman, for the very object of his mission compelled him to enact the character of a person who suspects everything, "you must confess, my good friend, that this stone has been travelling in a rather queer fashion."

"Why?" asked the fisherman.

"It came from Nantes or Paimboeuf by the Loire, did it not?"

"Well, does n't the Loire flow down this way?"

"Oh, I admit it may be convenient. But why not go direct from Saint-Nazaire to Belle-Isle?"

"Why, because the lighters are poor boats and keep the sea badly," answered the fisherman.

"That is not a reason."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but it 's easy seeing you 're not a sailor," added the fisherman, not without a slight shade of contempt.

"Still, would you explain this, my honest friend? In my poor opinion, to come from Paimboeuf to Pirial and then go from Pirial to Belle-Isle, is like going from La Roche-Bernard to Nantes and from Nantes to Pirial."

"And that would be the shortest way by water," replied the fisherman, stolidly.

"But there are so many turns and windings!"

The fisherman shook his head.

"The shortest road from one point to another," insisted D'Artagnan, "is the straight line."

"You forget the tide, monsieur."

"Oh, I don't see that the tide matters much."

"And the wind."

"Yes, there 's something in that."

"Undoubtedly. The current of the Loire will drive almost any boat as far as Le Croisic. If a vessel has to refit or give the crew a little rest, it hugs the coast and makes for Pirial; at Pirial it will find a current, running in the opposite direction, which will take it to Isle Dumet, two leagues and a half."

"Granted."

"From there the current of the Vilaine will bring it to another island, Hoëdic."

"I follow you."

"Well, you see, monsieur, that from Hoëdic to Belle-Isle it 's all plain sailing. The sea, broken both above and below, is a canal, as smooth as a looking-glass, between the two islands. The lighters glide along it like ducks on the Loire. Now you see how it is."

"I don't care," persisted this stubborn M. Agnan, "it 's a very roundabout course, for all you may say."

"Ah! but it 's M. Fouquet's will," answered the fisherman,

to clinch the matter, lifting his woolen cap at mention of that venerated name.

A look of D'Artagnan, keen and piercing as the blade of a poniard, found nothing in the old man's heart save the most innocent trustfulness, nothing in his face save content and indifference. He said, "It 's M. Fouquet's will," in the same tone in which he would have said, "It 's God's will."

D'Artagnan had gone a little out of his way with the fisherman. Now that the lighters had started, the only boat left at Pirial was the old man's, and it did not look fit for sea unless there were some repairs done on it.

So D'Artagnan patted Furet, and that charming quadruped showed his genial disposition by at once starting on his journey, with his feet in the salt marsh and his nose to that dry wind which bends the reeds and scanty broom of this country.

It was going on five o'clock when D'Artagnan reached Le Croisic.

If he had been a poet he must have enjoyed the fine spectacle of those immense beaches, often more than three miles broad, covered at high tide, but standing out at ebb tide in all their gray desolation, strewn with polyps and dead seaweed, with white, smooth pebbles scattered in every direction, like the bones in some vast cemetery.

But the ambitious soldier or statesman no longer has the sweet consolation of being able to gaze at the heavens for the purpose of reading therein a hope or a warning. For him the reddening skies mean wind and storm; for him the white, fleecy clouds that float across the azure are simply an indication that the sea will be smooth and gentle.

D'Artagnan noticed that the sky was blue and that the air was laden with balmy, saline odors; he said to himself:

"I 'll embark at first tide, though I have to do so on a cockle-shell."

At Le Croisic, as he had already done at Pirial, he noticed enormous piles of stone on the beach. These gigantic walls, which were broken down and transported to Belle-Isle at the turn of every tide, seemed to the eyes of the musketeer the consequence and the proof of everything he had surmised at Pirial.

Was M. Fouquet repairing a wall? Was he constructing a fortress? To know he must see.

D'Artagnan put Furet in the stable, supped, slept, and next

morning, at daylight, was walking on the harbor, or, rather, on the shingle.

The harbor at Le Croisic is fifty feet wide; it has a look-out which resembles an enormous raised cake on a plate. The flat beach is the plate. A hundred barrowfuls of earth, solidified with pebbles and rounded into cones, with winding passages between, form the cake as well as the look-out.

So it is to-day, and so it was a hundred and eighty years ago. But the cake was not then nearly so large, nor was it, in all likelihood, surrounded by the ornamental trellises which the worthy ediles of the poor and pious village have planted along the winding alleys that lead to the little terrace.

Three or four fishermen were on the shingle, discussing sardines and prawns.

M. Agnan, his whole face alive with rough, good-natured gayety, approached them, smiling.

"Any fishing to-day?" he inquired.

"Yes, monsieur," answered one of them; "we're waiting for the tide."

"Where do you fish, my friends?"

"Along the coasts."

"Good fishing on the coasts?"

"Well, that depends; round about the islands it's pretty fair."

"But the islands are far off, aren't they?"

"Oh, not very far; about four leagues."

"Four leagues! a regular voyage!"

The fisherman burst out laughing in M. Agnan's face.

"Yes, but just listen," observed the latter, with his usual air of artless stupidity, "don't you lose sight of land when you're four leagues from the coast?"

"Not always."

"Well, it's far, very far, indeed; else I should have asked you to take me on board and show me a thing I never saw in my life."

"What's that?"

"A sea-fish alive."

"You are from the provinces, monsieur?" asked one of the fishermen.

"Yes, from Paris."

The Breton shrugged his shoulders; then:

"Have you ever seen M. Fouquet at Paris?" he inquired.

"Often," replied D'Artagnan.

"Often?" repeated the fishermen, forming a circle and closing round the Parisian. "You know him?"

"A little; he is an intimate friend of my master."

"Ah!" exclaimed the fishermen.

"And," added D'Artagnan, "I have seen his châteaux at Saint-Mandé and Vaux, and his hôtel at Paris."

"It 's beautiful, is n't it?"

"Magnificent."

"Not so beautiful as Belle-Isle, though," remarked a fisherman.

"Bah!" retorted D'Artagnan, laughing scornfully, which roused the wrath of his hearers.

"It 's not hard to tell you never saw Belle-Isle," retorted the most inquisitive of the fishermen. "Do you know that it 's six leagues both ways, and that it has trees you never saw the like of, even on the fosses at Nantes?"

"Trees in the sea?" cried D'Artagnan. "I rather fancy I 'd like to see that!"

"There 's nothing to hinder you; we 're going to fish at Hoëdic; come along. From there you 'll see the dark trees of Belle-Isle standing out against the sky, a real paradise, and the white line of the château, which cuts the sea-line like a blade."

"Ah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "that must be very beautiful. But do you know there are a hundred towers at M. Fouquet's château at Vaux?"

The Breton raised his head with an air of profound admiration, but he was not convinced.

"A hundred towers!" said he. "All the same, it can't be as beautiful as Belle-Isle. Would you like to see Belle-Isle?"

"But is it possible to see it?" asked M. Agnan.

"Yes, with the governor's leave."

"But how should I know this governor of yours?"

"Oh, you know M. Fouquet; all you have to do is to tell your name."

"Ah, but, my friends, you see I am not a gentleman."

"Any one can enter Belle-Isle," continued the fisherman, in his strong, pure tongue, "as long as he does not intend any harm to Belle-Isle or its master."

A slight shiver ran down the body of the musketeer.

"That 's true," he thought. Then, recovering himself: "If I were sure," said he, "I should not be sea-sick —"

"Sea-sick on that?" cried the fisherman, pointing proudly to his pretty round-bottomed boat.

"Here goes, then! you have persuaded me!" exclaimed M. Agnan; "I 'm for Belle-Isle. But will they let me land?"

"We 're going to land, you may take my word for it."

"You are? and for what purpose?"

"For what purpose? Why, to sell our fish to the privateers."

"Eh! — Did you say privateers?"

"Yes, M. Fouquet has built two privateers to chase the Dutch and English, and we sell fish to the crews of these little vessels."

"Oho! Oho!" thought D'Artagnan, "better and better! printing-presses, bastions, privateers! So M. Fouquet is by no means the insignificant sort of an enemy I had fancied. It 's worth the trouble of putting one's self about a little to get a closer view of him."

"We leave at half-past five," added the fisherman, gravely.

"I'll be with you. You may be quite sure I won't let you go without me."

So D'Artagnan took care to be present when the fishermen were hauling their barks down with a capstan to meet the tide. And when the sea rose M. Agnan was himself hauled on board, all the time exhibiting such signs of terror that the little cabin boys who were watching him with their great, intelligent eyes had to roar with laughter.

He lay down upon a folded sail and did not interfere with any of the preparations while the boat was being got ready for sea; with its large, square sail, it was in the offing in less than two hours.

The fishermen, who were very busy the whole time the vessel was going, did not notice that their passenger had not turned pale, or groaned, or given any other sign of suffering; and that, in spite of the vessel's terrible pitching and rolling, for there was no one at the helm, this fresh-water sailor had lost neither his coolness nor his appetite.

Then they fished, and were rather successful with their fishing. Plenty of flounders and soles came along gambolling to bite at the lines baited with prawns. Two nets had already burst asunder with the immense weight of cod and congers; three sea-eels vexed the hold with their slimy convolutions and dying contortions.

M. Agnan, the fishermen declared, had brought them good luck. The soldier found the work so much to his taste that he put his hand to the job — that is to say, to the lines — with great gusto and uttered roars of joy, with *mordioux* enough to have astounded the musketeers themselves, whenever a shock given to his line by a vanquished victim strained the muscles of his arm and forced him to exert all his skill and strength.

This pleasure party had made him oblivious of his diplomatic mission, and he was struggling with an enormous conger, holding fast with one hand to the side of the vessel in order to get a grip with the other of the gaping jowl of his enemy, when the skipper said:

"Take care we're not seen from Belle-Isle!"

These words had the same effect on D'Artagnan that the whizzing of the first bullet has on a day of battle. He let go the line and the conger, which, one dragged by the other, returned to the water.

D'Artagnan now perceived, about half a league away, the blue and strongly marked outlines of the rocks of Belle-Isle, and the white, majestic line of the château; then the land with its forests and verdant plains and pastures and cattle. These were the things that first attracted the musketeer's attention.

The sun was now near the horizon and its golden rays enveloped the enchanted island in a luminous mist of effulgent splendor. Thanks to this dazzling light, nothing could be seen of it but the flattened points; every shadow was strongly accentuated, and marked with a band of darkness the gleaming sheet of the meadows and walls.

"Why," exclaimed D'Artagnan, when these masses of black rock came into view, "yonder are fortifications that do not need the aid of an engineer to prevent a landing. Where the devil could any one effect a landing on an island which God defends so thoroughly?"

"This way," replied the skipper, altering the sail and giving a turn to the rudder, which headed the boat for a pretty little harbor coquettishly curved and newly battlemented.

"What the deuce is the name of that place?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Locmaria," answered the fisherman.

"And the place beyond it?"

"Bangos."

"And the one beyond that?"

"Saujen — then the palace."

"*Mordioux!* Why, it's quite a world. And yonder are soldiers!"

"There are seventeen hundred men in Belle-Isle," said the fisherman, proudly. "Do you know that the garrison is never less than twenty-two companies of infantry?"

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan to himself, stamping with his foot, "his Majesty was right, then!"

They landed.

CHAPTER LXIX.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL DOUBTLESS BE QUITE AS SURPRISED AS D'ARTAGNAN WAS TO COME ACROSS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

One of the consequences of going ashore, though it were from the smallest skiff that ever danced on the ocean, is a condition of excitement and confusion that deprives the mind of the freedom necessary to study off-hand the new locality that has come within its ken.

The gang-plank, the bustling sailor, the splash of the water on the shingle, the cries and fuss and flurry of those waiting on the beach, are so many elements in that sensation which may be summed up in one word: hesitation.

It was not, then, until after he had landed and stood some minutes on the strand that D'Artagnan noticed around the harbor and farther inland a considerable number of workmen moving about.

At his feet he recognized the five lighters, loaded with freestone, he had seen leave the harbor of Pirial. The stones were being transported to the shore by means of a chain formed by twenty-five or thirty peasants.

The dressed stones were hoisted on carts which took them in the direction the undressed stones were going, namely, to certain works, the importance and extent of which D'Artagnan was as yet unable to determine.

The activity that reigned everywhere was not unlike that which Telemachus remarked when he landed at Salentum.

D'Artagnan was strongly tempted to push on further, but if his curiosity gave ground for suspicion, he feared he might excite mistrust. So he advanced very gradually, scarcely venturing along the line traced by the fishermen on the strand, observing everything, saying nothing, except that now and then he disarmed hostile conjectures by asking some silly question or other, with a polite bow.

However, while his companions were absorbed in their commerce, giving or selling their fish to the workmen or the townsmen, D'Artagnan had got a little in front of them, and, finding that not much attention was paid to him, he began to give an intelligent and steady look to the things before him.

What first attracted his notice were certain manipulations of the ground about which the practised eye of the soldier could not be mistaken.

At the two extremities of the port, in order that two discharges might cross each other on the axis major of the ellipse formed by the basin, two batteries had been constructed, evidently destined for the reception of flanking ordnance pieces, for D'Artagnan saw that the workmen were finishing the platforms, and arranging the wooden demi-circumference upon which the wheels of the pieces were to turn, so as to point in every direction over the epaulement.

At the side of each of these batteries other workmen were supplying the casing of another battery with gabions filled with earth. The latter had embrasures, and a foreman summoned the men successively who were to bind the saucissons with ropes, and also those who were cutting out the lozenges and rectangles of turf intended to hold fast the guards of the embrasures.

These works were already so far advanced that they might almost be regarded as finished. They were not supplied with cannon, but the platforms had their forms and their madriers all ready; the earth, carefully beaten, had strengthened them, and in the event of the necessary guns being in the island, the port could be completely armed in three days.

What astonished D'Artagnan, after a close inspection of the coast and town batteries, was the discovery that Belle-Isle was defended according to an entirely novel system, of which the Comte de la Fère had spoken to him more than once as being a great improvement, although he had never before seen it carried out.

These fortifications did not belong to the Dutch system of Marollais, nor to the French system of the Chevalier Antoine de Ville, but to the system of Manesson Mallet, a skilful engineer, who, some six or eight years before, had left the service of Portugal and entered that of France.

The most noticeable point about the works was this: instead of rising above the ground, as did the old ramparts intended to protect cities against escalades, they, on the contrary, sank below it; and that which constituted the height of the walls was the depth of the ditches.

It did not take D'Artagnan long to recognize the merits of this system, which did not give any advantage to cannon. Moreover, as these ditches were beneath the level of the sea, they could be flooded by subterranean sluices.

But, as we have said, the works were almost finished, and a body of laborers, under the direction of a man who seemed to be a foreman, or manager, were busy placing the last stones in position. A bridge of planks, flung over the ditch for the convenience of the laborers who trundled wheelbarrows, connected the interior with the exterior.

D'Artagnan inquired, with a sort of artless curiosity, if he might cross the bridge, and was told there was no order prohibiting it. He crossed the bridge, then, and went up to the workmen. They were under the orders of the man whom D'Artagnan had already noticed, and who apparently was the engineer-in-chief. A plan was spread on a big stone which was used as a table, and a crane was in operation at some distance.

The engineer, who, on account of his importance, was the first to attract the attention of D'Artagnan, wore a doublet the richness of which was little in harmony with his occupation, the costume of a mason being more suited to it than that of a lord.

He was a man, moreover, of lofty stature, with broad, square shoulders, and he wore a hat entirely covered with feathers. He gesticulated in the most majestic fashion imaginable, and seemed — for all that could be seen of him was his back — to be rating the workmen for their laziness or their lack of vigor.

D'Artagnan continued to advance.

After a few moments the man of the plumes stopped gesticulating and, with his hands on his knees and his back bent

forward, began following the efforts of six workmen who were endeavoring to raise a block of cut stone to the height of a piece of wood destined to support it, so that the rope of the crane might be passed under it.

The six men, all collected together at one end of the stone, could never succeed in lifting it more than eight or ten inches, and that with terrible sweating and puffing. A seventh man stood ready to slip in the roller that was to support it, so soon as there was room enough under it. But the stone had already slipped twice from their hands before attaining a sufficient elevation.

Of course it is unnecessary to state that every time the stone dropped from their hands, the men took a leap backward to save their feet from being crushed.

A third attempt had no other result except further to dishearten the workmen.

And yet whenever the six men bent anew over the stone, the man of the plumes shouted in a thundering voice, "Steady!" a command which is supposed to have a most encouraging effect in the case of all feats of strength.

Then he drew himself up to his full height.

"Oh! oh!" he cried, "what is the meaning of this? Am I dealing with men of straw? *Corbœuf!* stand aside! and I'll show you how a little thing like that is done."

"Confound the fellow!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "is he thinking of attempting to lift the stone himself? That should be worth seeing."

The workmen stood aside as directed, with downcast looks and many a shake of the head, all except the man at the madrier, who stood ready to execute his task.

The man of the plumes approached the stone, stooped down, slipped his hands under the end that had not sunk into the earth, stiffened his herculean muscles, and without any straining, with a slow movement like that of a machine, he raised the rock a foot above the ground.

The workman at the madrier took advantage of the opportunity afforded him and slipped the roller under the stone.

"That's how to do it!" said the giant, not dropping the stone, but letting it down gently on its support.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I know only one man capable of such a feat as that!"

"Eh?" cried the colossus, turning round.

"Porthos!" murmured D'Artagnan, thunderstruck; "Porthos at Belle-Isle!"

The man of the plume, on his side, fixed his eyes on the pretended steward, and, in spite of his disguise, recognized him.

"D'Artagnan!" he cried.

And the blood rushed to his face.

"Hush!" he whispered to D'Artagnan.

"Hush!" returned the musketeer.

In fact, if Porthos had just been discovered by D'Artagnan, D'Artagnan had just been discovered by Porthos.

The first thing that interested each of them was the keeping of his own particular secret. The next impulse of the two men was to throw themselves into each other's arms.

But after embracing came reflecting.

"Why the devil is Porthos at Belle-Isle, and why is he engaged in lifting stones?" said D'Artagnan to himself.

Only D'Artagnan kept this question inside his lips.

His friend, a less diplomatic person, was in the habit of thinking aloud.

"What the devil brought you to Belle-Isle?" he asked, "and what are you doing here?"

It was necessary to answer without hesitation. And to be obliged to hesitate for an answer to Porthos would be a humiliation from which the vanity of D'Artagnan could never recover.

"*Pardieu!* my friend, I am at Belle-Isle because you are here."

"Oh, nonsense," returned Porthos, visibly bewildered by the argument and trying to disentangle it with that lucidity of deduction wherewith we all are acquainted.

"Undoubtedly," persisted the musketeer, who did not wish to give his friend time to make up his mind; "I have been to Pierrefonds to see you!"

"You don't say so?"

"Yes."

"And you did not find me there?"

"No, but I found Mouston."

"He's well, I hope?"

"I should think so!"

"But Mouston never told you I was here?"

"Why should n't he? Have I deserved to lose the confidence of Mouston?"

"No, but he did not know."

"Well, at least the reason you give now cannot wound my self-esteem."

"But how have you managed to come across me?"

"Oh, my dear fellow, a great nobleman like you always leaves some marks behind him to trace him by, and I should n't think much of myself if I were n't able to follow the tracks of my friends."

Flattering as this explanation was, it did not entirely satisfy Porthos.

"But I cannot have left any traces, for I came here in disguise," said Porthos.

"In disguise?" repeated D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Disguised how?"

"As a miller."

"Do you really believe, Porthos, that such a distinguished nobleman as you are can imitate the manners of the common people so successfully as to deceive anybody?"

"Well, I assure you, my friend, I acted the part so cleverly that I deceived everybody."

"You see you have n't prevented me from meeting and discovering you."

"That is what I want to know about. How is it you have met and discovered me?"

"Hold on, I was going to tell you. Just fancy that Mouston —"

"Ah! the rascal! — so it was Mouston —" said Porthos, bending the two triumphal arches which served him for eyebrows.

"Hold on, I tell you, hold on! It was n't Mouston's fault, since he did not know himself where you were."

"I know it. That is why I am so eager to understand how you —"

"Oh! what an impatient fellow you are, Porthos!"

"When I do not understand a thing I am terrible."

"Well, you 'll understand in a moment. Aramis wrote to you at Pierrefonds, did n't he?"

"Yes."

"He wrote to you to come before the Equinox?"

"That is true."

"Well, is not everything clear now?" said D'Artagnan, hoping that this reason would be satisfactory to Porthos.

Porthos seemed for a few moments to be in the throes of violent mental labor.

"Yes, yes," said he, "I understand now. When you learned that Aramis told me to come before the Equinox, you saw that I was to come to him for the purpose of meeting him. You inquired where Aramis was, saying: 'Where Aramis is, there Porthos is sure to be.' You found that Aramis was in Bretagne, and you said to yourself:

"'Porthos is sure to be in Bretagne.'"

"Eh! why, just exactly what I said to myself. In good sooth, Porthos, I can't understand why you have not become a soothsayer. Then you will understand also that, on reaching La Roche-Bernard, I heard of the splendid fortifications that were being erected at Belle-Isle. My curiosity was excited by what I heard. I embarked in a fishing-boat, without having the least idea you were here. I came. I saw a grand fellow lifting up a rock which Ajax himself would have scarcely moved. I cried out: 'The Baron de Bracieux alone is capable of such a feat!' You heard me, turned round, recognized me, we embraced, and, my dear friend, if you have no objection, we'll embrace over again."

"Everything is explained now; in fact, nothing could be plainer," said Porthos.

And he embraced D'Artagnan so affectionately that the musketeer did not get back his breath for full five minutes afterwards.

"Why!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "you are stronger than ever! and, luckily, most of your strength is in your arms!"

Porthos saluted D'Artagnan with a gracious smile.

During the five minutes D'Artagnan had devoted to the task of recovering his respiration he had been reflecting that he had a very difficult part to play.

He had to be always putting questions, and never answering any. By the time his capacity for breathing was fully restored, his plan of campaign was drawn up.

CHAPTER LXX.

WHEREIN THE IDEAS OF D'ARTAGNAN, AT FIRST VERY MUCH INVOLVED, BEGIN TO CLEAR UP.

D'Artagnan at once took the offensive.

"Now that I have told you everything, my dear friend, or rather that you have guessed everything, tell me what you are doing here, covered with dust and mud?"

Porthos wiped his forehead, looking proudly around.

"I rather fancy," said he, "that you can see what I am doing here."

"Oh, of course; you are lifting stones."

"Oh, merely to show those idle fellows what a man is like," answered Porthos, contemptuously. "But you understand —"

"Yes; lifting stones is not your trade, though many whose trade it is do not lift them in your style. That 's the very thing made me ask you just now, 'What are you doing here,' baron?"

"I am studying topography, chevalier."

"Studying topography?"

"Yes; but what are you doing yourself in those citizen's clothes of yours?"

D'Artagnan saw he had committed a fault in giving expression to his amazement. Porthos had parried and thrust in return.

Luckily D'Artagnan was expecting the question.

"But you know," he replied, "that I am now only a simple citizen, really. My clothes need n't surprise you, then, for they suit my position."

"Humbug! you are a musketeer!"

"You 're entirely out, my good friend; I have resigned."

"Bah!"

"Good heavens! yes."

"And you have forsaken the service?"

"I have given it up."

"Forsaken the King?"

"Not a doubt of it."

Porthos raised his arms to heaven like a man who can't believe his ears.

"Well, that does beat me!" said he.

"It's true, nevertheless."

"And what led you to do such a thing?"

"The King annoyed me; Mazarin, as you are aware, was for a long time an object of disgust to me; so I pulled off the uniform."

"But is not Mazarin dead?"

"I should think he was, *parbleu!* But I offered my resignation and it was accepted a couple of months before he died. Then, as soon as I found myself free, I galloped to Pierrefonds to see my dear Porthos. I had heard of the delightful division you had made of your time, and I wanted to make the same division of mine for a fortnight."

"My friend, you know that it is not only for a fortnight my house is open to you, but for a year, for ten years, for your whole life."

"Thank you, Porthos."

"And — by the way, you don't happen to want money?" said Porthos, jingling some fifty louis or so in his pocket. "In that case, you know —"

"No, I don't want anything. My savings are lodged with Planchet, who pays me interest."

"Your savings?"

"Undoubtedly. Why should n't I save money as well as another, Porthos?"

"Oh, that is not what I meant. On the contrary, I always suspected — or, rather, Aramis always suspected — that you had laid up some money. As for me, of course you understand I do not mix myself up with mere household matters. Still, I venture to presume that a musketeer's savings must be rather scanty."

"Beyond a doubt, when compared with those of a millionaire like you, Porthos. But you can judge for yourself. I had laid by twenty-five thousand livres."

"Quite a nice little sum," said Porthos, courteously.

"And," continued D'Artagnan, "I added to it another two hundred thousand livres on the twenty-eighth of last month."

Porthos opened his eyes in amazement. There was a question in them, too; it was:

"And where in the devil's name did you steal such a sum as that, my dear friend?"

After a few moments he was able to voice his astonishment.

"Two hundred thousand livres, my dear friend!"

"Yes, which, with the twenty-five thousand I had and the twenty thousand I have about me, make up two hundred and forty-five thousand livres."

"But, in heaven's name, where does it all come from?"

"Oh, I'll tell you all about it presently. But you must have so many things to tell me about yourself that my story may as well come after."

"Bravo!" cried Porthos. "So we 're all rich. But what is it you want me to tell you?"

"You must tell me how it happened that Aramis was appointed —"

"Ah! Bishop of Vannes."

"The very thing," said D'Artagnan, "Bishop of Vannes. Dear Aramis! do you know, he seems to be getting on!"

"Yes, yes; and he won't stop where he is, either."

"What 's that? You think the violet stockings won't content him and he 's after the red hat?"

"Hush-sh! he has a promise of it."

"You don't say so! From the King?"

"From one more powerful than the King."

"The devil, Porthos! you 're telling me things that are past belief!"

"And why so? Is there not always some one in France who is more powerful than the King?"

"Oh, that 's true enough. In Louis XIII.'s time it was Richelieu; during the Regency it was Mazarin; in Louis XIV.'s time it is M.—"

"Well?"

"Fouquet."

"Right, my friend, you have hit on the name at the first guess."

"So M. Fouquet has promised the hat to Aramis?"

Porthos immediately assumed an air of diplomatic reserve.

"My dear friend," said he, "God preserve me from meddling with other people's business, or from revealing secrets it may be other people's interest to keep in the dark. When you see Aramis he will tell you everything he may think it right to tell you."

"Correct, as usual, Porthos, and you are a very padlock of reticence. Let us get back to our own affairs."

"Yes," said Porthos.

"You told me you came here to study topography?"

"Certainly."

"Odds-fish! what fine things you are going to do!"

"What do you mean?"

"These fortifications are admirable."

"That is your opinion?"

"Undoubtedly, unless besieged according to all the regular forms, Belle-Isle is impregnable."

Porthos rubbed his hands.

"My opinion also," said he.

"But who the devil has been fortifying this battered-down old barracks?"

Porthos swelled visibly with pride.

"I did not tell you, then?" said he.

"No."

"And you never suspected?"

"Never. All I can say is that whoever he is, he has made himself master of every system, and finally adopted the best; at least, so I believe."

"Hush!" whispered Porthos. "Spare my modesty, my dear D'Artagnan."

"Really!" exclaimed the musketeer, "so it was you who — oh!"

"Do not make me blush, my friend."

"You who have planned, traced, and combined these bastions, redans, curtains, demi-lunes? you who are preparing that covered way?"

"Oh! please stop!"

"You who have constructed that lunette with its reëntering angles and its salient angles?"

"Pray, now, my friend —"

"You who have given that inclination to the openings in your embrasures, by means of which you so effectively protect the men who serve your guns?"

"Why, good heavens! yes!"

"Oh, Porthos! Porthos! let me bow down to the ground in your presence! Permit me to express my boundless admiration. But you have never before allowed us even a glimpse of your wonderful genius! I hope, my friend, you will point me out all this in detail."

"Nothing easier — here is my plan."

"Show it to me."

Porthos led D'Artagnan to the stone upon which the plan

was laid out. At the bottom of the plan was written, in that formidable caligraphy of which we have already had occasion to speak:

"Instead of employing the square or rectangle, according to the custom of the day, you will suppose your fortress enclosed within a regular hexagon, this polygon having the advantage of presenting more angles than the quadrilateral. Each side of your hexagon, the length of which will be determined by the size of the fortress, will be divided into two equal parts, and from the middle point you will raise a perpendicular toward the centre of the polygon which will equal in length the sixth part of one of the sides. From the extremities of each side of the polygon you will draw diagonals which will cut the perpendicular. These two straight lines will form the lines of the defence."

"The devil!" cried D'Artagnan, stopping at this point of the demonstration. "Why, it 's a complete system, Porthos!"

"Entirely complete," answered Porthos. "Shall we go on?"

"No, I have read enough of it. But since you are directing the works in person, my dear Porthos, what need was there of writing out your plan?"

"Ah, my friend, in case of death!"

"What do you say? — death?"

"Alas, yes! we are all mortal."

"True, my friend; you have an answer to everything."

And he laid back the plan on the stone.

But even during the few seconds the plan had been in his hands, D'Artagnan had had time to notice under the enormous writing of Porthos a much more delicate hand, a hand that reminded him of certain letters addressed to Marie Michon which he had happened to see in the days of his youth. But the India-rubber had been passed so often over this writing that only a trained eye like that of our musketeer could have detected it.

"Bravo! my dear friend, bravo!" said D'Artagnan.

"And now you know all you wanted to know, do you not?" asked Porthos, with a flourish.

"Good heavens! yes. But you will do me a last favor, my dear friend?"

"Speak, I am the master here."

"Tell me the name of that gentleman walking over yonder."

"Where? over yonder?"

"Behind the soldiers."

"Followed by a lackey?"

"Exactly."

"In company with a ragamuffin in black?"

"You have hit it."

"It is M. Gétard."

"What is M. Gétard, my friend?"

"The architect of the house."

"Of what house?"

"M. Fouquet's house."

"Ah! so you belong to the household of M. Fouquet, Porthos?"

"I? What do you mean?" cried Porthos, reddening up to the very tips of his ears with indignation.

"But you said *the house*, when speaking of Belle-Isle, just in the tone in which you speak of your château at Pierrefonds."

Porthos pursed up his lips.

"My dear fellow, does not Belle-Isle belong to M. Fouquet?" he remarked.

"Yes."

"Just as Pierrefonds belongs to me?"

"Certainly."

"You have been to Pierrefonds?"

"I told you I was there less than two months ago."

"While you were there did you happen to see a person walking about with a rule in his hand?"

"No, but I might have seen him if he had happened to be walking about at the time."

"Well, the name of that person is M. Boulingrin."

"What is M. Boulingrin?"

"Now I have you. Whenever any one says to me: 'Who is that person walking about with a rule in his hand?' I answer: 'The architect of my house.' Well, then, M. Gétard is M. Fouquet's Boulingrin. But he has nothing to do with the fortifications; they are my work exclusively — exclusively, do you understand?"

"Ah! Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, dropping his arms like the vanquished soldier who has just surrendered his sword, "you are not only a herculean topographer, but you are the keenest logician I ever encountered."

"You think so? Yes, I reasoned out that matter powerfully."

And he puffed as strongly as the conger D'Artagnan had let slip in the morning.

"And now as for the ragamuffin with M. Gétard, does he belong to M. Fouquet's household?"

"Oh," returned Porthos, disdainfully, "that is a M. Jupenet, some sort of poet or other."

"Is he staying here?"

"I believe so."

"I thought M. Fouquet had poets enough where he is: Scudéri, Loret, Pellisson, La Fontaine. To tell the truth, Porthos, that poet does you no credit."

"Oh, what saves us, my dear friend, is that he is not here as a poet."

"In what capacity, then, is he here?"

"He is here as a printer. And, by the way, that reminds me I have a word or two to say to this caitiff."

"Well, say it."

Porthos beckoned to Jupenet, who had at once recognized D'Artagnan and was not anxious to have a nearer view of him. But Porthos beckoned to him a second time so imperiously that he had no choice but to obey.

He approached them.

"So," said Porthos, "you landed only yesterday, and you are up to mischief already?"

"How so, M. le Baron?" inquired Jupenet, all in a tremble.

"That printing-press of yours has been groaning all the night, monsieur," answered Porthos. "*Corbœuf!* I could n't sleep a wink on account of it."

"Monsieur —" timidly objected Jupenet.

"You 're not required to print anything yet; then you have no reason for setting your press a-going. What were you printing last night?"

"Only a light little thing of my own, monsieur."

"Light! Nonsense, monsieur, your press was shrieking as if it were in the last agony. Let this not happen again, do you understand?"

"It will not, monsieur."

"I have your promise?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very well, I pardon you this time. You may go."

The poet retired with the same humility he had shown when he advanced.

"And now that I have given that fellow a piece of my mind, let us go to breakfast," said Porthos.

"Yes," assented D'Artagnan, "let us go to breakfast."

"I am bound to tell you, lest you should feel disappointed, that we have only two hours for our repast."

"Well, I suppose that can't be helped, and we must try to do the best we can. But how is it we have only two hours?"

"Because it is high tide at one o'clock, and at high tide I must start for Vannes. But I am sure to be back to-morrow. You must stay here in the meantime, my dear friend; you know the house is your own. I have a good cook and a good cellar —"

"No, I have something better in mind than that," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"What is it?"

"You are going to Vannes, you say?"

"Undoubtedly."

"To see Aramis?"

"Yes."

"Well, you see, I came from Paris expressly to see Aramis."

"Very true."

"I will go with you, then."

"Do; nothing could please me better."

"Only I should have visited Aramis first, and you next. But man proposes and God disposes. I have visited you first; now I shall visit Aramis next."

"Capital!"

"How long does it take to go from here to Vannes?"

"Why, only six hours. Three by sea to Sarzeau, three by land from Sarzeau to Vannes."

"How convenient for you! You must be often at Vannes, living so near the bishopric?"

"Yes, once a week. But wait till I get my plan."

Porthos picked up his plan, folded it carefully, and stuffed it into one of his capacious pockets.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, aside. "I think I know now who is the real engineer of Belle-Isle."

Two hours later, at high tide, Porthos and D'Artagnan started for Sarzeau.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A PROCESSION AT VANNES.

They had a fairly quick passage from Belle-Isle to Sarzeau, thanks to one of the little privateers which D'Artagnan had already heard spoken of during his journey, and which, built for speed and destined to run down an enemy, were at that time safely sheltered in the roadstead of Locmaria. One of them, however, was employed for the time in carrying passengers between Belle-Isle and the continent.

D'Artagnan again had an opportunity of convincing himself that, however eminent Porthos was as an engineer and topographer, he was not profoundly versed in state secrets.

In fact, in the eyes of any one else, his consummate ignorance would have passed off as a most profound exhibition of dissimulation. But D'Artagnan knew his Porthos; knew all the recesses of his soul too well not to discover a secret if they happened to be hiding one, like those careful, reformed old bachelors who, with their eyes shut, can find such or such a book on the shelves of their libraries, such or such a piece of linen in any drawer in their wardrobes.

If, then, this cunning D'Artagnan had found nothing after drawing out his Porthos, it was because there was nothing there to be found.

"No matter," said he, "I'll learn more in half an hour at Vannes than Porthos has been able to learn in two months at Belle-Isle. But to do so, I must see to it that Porthos does not make use of the only stratagem I have left at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my coming."

All D'Artagnan's occupation, then, at present, was limited to the task of keeping an eye on Porthos.

It is our duty to state, however, that Porthos did not merit this excessive distrust. Porthos did not dream of evil. D'Artagnan may, at first sight, have inspired him with a little suspicion. But no sooner had D'Artagnan regained the place he had always held in that kindly, honest heart, than every cloud vanished from the great eyes that were now and then fixed tenderly on Porthos' friend.

After debarking, Porthos inquired whether his horses were waiting for him, and he soon perceived them at the crossing of

the road which turns round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that town, leads to Vannes.

The horses were two in number, one for M. du Vallon and one for his equerry. For ever since Mousqueton had found himself confined to a carriage as a means of locomotion, Porthos had an equerry.

D'Artagnan fully expected that Porthos would propose to send this equerry on a horse to lead back another, and was prepared to resist the proposal stoutly. But D'Artagnan's expectation was agreeably deceived. Porthos simply ordered his servant to alight and remain at Sarzeau till his return, while D'Artagnan was to ride his horse.

"What a careful, provident person you are, my dear friend!" said D'Artagnan, when he found himself in the equerry's saddle.

"Yes; but in the present case I have to thank the gracious courtesy of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my orders."

"And good horses they are, too, *mordioux!* to come from a bishop's stables! It is true that Aramis is a rather singular sort of bishop."

"He is a holy man," answered Porthos, with almost a nasal whine and with his eyes raised to heaven.

"Then he must have changed very much," answered D'Artagnan, "for we have known him when he was passably profane."

"The grace of God has touched him," said Porthos.

"I'm glad of it!" replied D'Artagnan; "it makes me the more anxious to have a look at this dear Aramis of mine."

And he spurred his horse, which dashed off more swiftly than before.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Porthos, "if we go at this gait we'll be there in one hour instead of two."

"How far is it from here?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"Well, that is quite a little journey."

"I might have taken you by the canal. But to the devil with rowers and boat-horses! The first are turtles and the second snails. And when you can have a good courser between your legs, he's worth all the rowers in the world, and everything else, too."

"You're right, Porthos, — besides, you're such a magnificent figure on horseback yourself."

"A little heavy, my friend; I have increased in weight of late."

"And how much do you weigh?"

"Three hundred pounds," answered Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

"So you see I have to choose a horse that is long and broad in the loins; otherwise I should break one down in a couple of hours."

"Yes, only a horse fit for a giant is up to your size, is not that so, Porthos?"

"You are very courteous, my friend," said Porthos, with majestic kindliness.

"By the way, my dear fellow, it looks to me as if your horse were sweating already," replied D'Artagnan.

"I don't wonder, it's so hot — ah! can you see Vannes now?"

"Yes, very well. It's a very beautiful city, is it not?"

"Oh, charming. At least, so Aramis says. I think it rather black. But it would seem black is a beautiful color in the eyes of artists. I'm sorry for it."

"Why do you say that, Porthos?"

"Because I have lately had my château at Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white."

"Humph!" ejaculated D'Artagnan; "you did right, white is more cheerful."

"Yes, but less august. At least, so Aramis says. Fortunately, there are dealers in black. I'll have Pierrefonds plastered over again black, that's all. If gray is beautiful, black must be superb; you understand, my dear friend?"

"Upon my soul, I do; and what you say seems logical enough."

"Have you never been at Vannes before, D'Artagnan?"

"Never!"

"Then you are not acquainted with the city?"

"No."

"Well, stay a moment," said Porthos, rising in his stirrups, a movement which bent the forequarters of his horse almost to the ground. "Do you see the spire yonder in the direction of the sun?"

"Certainly I see it."

"That's the cathedral."

"What is it called?"

"Saint-Pierre. Now look down at the suburb on the left; do you see another cross?"

"As plain as can be."

"That is Saint-Paterne, the parish church that Aramis likes better than any other."

"Ah!"

"There 's no doubt about it. Saint-Paterne, you see, is said to have been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis declares he was n't; and it is truer still that, as he is such a learned man, the saying might be a para-pera —"

"Dox, paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly. Much obliged. It is so awfully hot that one's tongue slips before he knows it."

"My dear friend," urged D'Artagnan, "go on with your interesting description. What is the name of yon immense white building with all those windows?"

"Ah! that is the college of the Jesuits. *Pardieu!* how clever you are to come so close to the great place of all! Do you see, just beside the college, a vast mansion, with towers and turrets, and built in a fine Gothic style, as that clown of a fellow, M. Gétard, calls it?"

"Yes, I see it. What follows?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides."

"What 's that you 're saying? Does he not live in the palace?"

"No; the palace is in ruins. Besides, the palace is in the city, and Aramis prefers the suburb. Now you know why he is so fond of Saint-Paterne. Saint-Paterne is in the suburb. And then this particular suburb has a mall, a tennis-court, and a Dominican monastery. Stay, you perceive yon fine steeple that rises to such a height? That 's it."

"Oh, I can perceive everything clearly."

"Moreover, the suburb is as it were a little city apart. It has its own walls and towers and fosses. Even the quay where all the boats land is in the suburb. If our little privateer did not draw eight feet of water, we might have arrived with all our sails spread, and anchored under the very windows of Aramis."

"Porthos, Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan; "you are a very well of science, a fountain of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me, you dazzle me."

"We are arrived at last," said Porthos, changing the conversation, with his usual modesty.

"It was time," thought D'Artagnan; "Aramis' horse was melting as fast as if he were made of ice."

Just at this moment they entered the suburb; but before they had advanced a hundred steps they were amazed to see that the streets were all strewn with flowers and green branches. From the ancient walls of Vannes were also hanging the oldest and strangest tapestries in France. From its iron balconies fell long white cloths all studded with bouquets. The streets were deserted. It was evident that the whole population must be gathered at some particular spot. The blinds were down, and the breeze penetrated the houses under the hangings, which cast long black shadows on the bare parts of the walls.

Suddenly, at the turn of a street, the chanting of psalms came to the ears of the two new arrivals. A crowd in holiday attire loomed up through the mists of incense which mounted to the heavens in bluish clouds, and with them arose clouds of rose-leaves also as high as the first stories.

Elevated above every head could be distinguished the crosses and the banners, those sacred emblems of religion. Beneath the crosses and banners, and, as it were, protected by them, the eye rested on a whole world of young girls, clad in white and crowned with flowers.

Along both sides of the streets, as a guard of honor for the procession, marched the soldiers of the garrison, with bouquets at the ends of their muskets and on the points of their lances.

While D'Artagnan and Porthos looked on with that reverence which good taste dictates, but which on the present occasion concealed a very eager desire to push forward, a magnificent canopy drew near, preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitentiary, and twelve canons.

A cantor with a voice of thunder, a cantor with a voice that must certainly have been picked out from all the voices in France, just as the drum-major of the Imperial Guard was afterwards to be picked out from among all the giants in the empire, a cantor escorted by four other cantors, who seemed to be there only for the purpose of playing the humble part of accompanists, made the very air vibrate and every window quiver.

Under the canopy could be seen a pale and noble face, with black eyes, black hair silvered with gray, a delicate and cautious mouth, and a prominent and pointed chin. The majestic head had on an episcopal mitre, which gave to the features an air of asceticism and evangelical meditation as well as of power and authority.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, when that lofty face passed before his eyes.

The prelate started. He seemed to have heard that voice as the dead man who rises again hears the voice of his Saviour. He raised his large black eyes with their long lashes, and directed them unhesitatingly toward the quarter whence the exclamation had proceeded. A single glance was enough: he saw D'Artagnan and Porthos quite close to him.

As for D'Artagnan, with his keenness of vision, he had at once seen and grasped everything. The full-length portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, to remain there forever.

One circumstance had particularly struck D'Artagnan. Aramis had colored when he perceived him; then, in an instant, might be read in his eyes all the imperious fire of the master blended imperceptibly with the affection of the friend.

Evidently Aramis had been whispering this question to himself:

"Why is D'Artagnan with Porthos, and what is his business at Vannes?"

Aramis understood all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan as soon as he had fixed his eyes on him and found that the musketeer's did not lower under his gaze. He was aware of his friend's intelligence and shrewdness, and feared he might discover the secret of his astonishment, and of the blush that accompanied it. He was still the same Aramis, always with some secret to hide.

So, to rid himself of that inquisitorial look, to force it to bend before him at any price, just as, at any price, a general silences the fire of a battery that embarrasses him, Aramis stretched out his beautiful white hand, upon which the amethyst of the pastoral ring sparkled, cut the air with the sign of the cross, and astounded his two friends by giving them his benediction.

Perhaps D'Artagnan, absorbed in other thoughts and unconsciously irreverent, might not have bent beneath that holy

blessing, had not Porthos, who witnessed his distraction, laid a friendly hand on his shoulder and crushed him down to the very earth.

D'Artagnan bowed down; indeed, he was very nearly lying flat upon the ground.

Meanwhile Aramis passed.

D'Artagnan had, like Antæus, only touched the earth, and felt quite in an angry temper when he rose and turned to Porthos. But there was no mistaking the intention of that honest Hercules: it was purely a sense of religious propriety that actuated him. Moreover, speech in the case of Porthos, so far from serving to disguise his thoughts, only rendered them the clearer.

"It was very affable of him to give a benediction to us two alone," said he. "Decidedly he is a very excellent and saintly man."

Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan did not answer.

"Look, my dear friend," went on Porthos, "he has seen us again, and, instead of continuing to keep up the slow march of the procession, he is walking faster. And the procession is doing so also! He is in a hurry to meet and embrace us — dear, dear Aramis!"

"Yes, all you say is true," answered D'Artagnan.

"Ah!" he thought, "the sly old fox saw me and will have time to make his preparations to receive me."

The procession had now passed and the road was free; D'Artagnan and Porthos rode direct to the episcopal residence, which was surrounded by a great crowd, anxious to witness the prelate's return.

D'Artagnan noticed that this crowd was mainly composed of tradesmen and soldiers. He recognized his friend's adroitness in the sort of partisans he had selected. Indeed, Aramis was not at all the sort of man who courts a popularity that brings no substantial advantage with it. Women, children, and old men form the ordinary retinue of ecclesiastics. But this was not the sort of retinue that Aramis wanted.

Ten minutes after the two friends had crossed the threshold of the episcopal residence, Aramis was preparing to enter it like a triumphant victor; the soldiers presented arms to him as if he were their military leader; the tradesmen saluted him as their friend, as their patron, rather than as their religious guide.

Aramis, to some extent, resembled those Roman senators whose doors were always thronged with clients.

In front of the door he held a consultation for half a minute or so with a Jesuit, who, to speak with him more confidentially, had thrust his head in under the canopy.

Then he passed through the open folding-doors, which were slowly closed behind him, and the crowd melted away, while the chants and prayers were still resounding in their ears.

The day was magnificent. The perfumes of the earth were blended with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The whole city was instinct with joy and strength and happiness.

D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had by its omnipotent power created all this joy and strength and happiness, and diffused everywhere these perfumes.

"Oho!" said he to himself, "Porthos has grown fatter; but Aramis has grown taller."

CHAPTER LXXII.

MONSEIGNEUR THE BISHOP OF VANNES.

Porthos and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door known only to his friends.

It is unnecessary to state that Porthos had acted as guide to D'Artagnan. The worthy baron treated every house pretty much as if it were his own. Still, whether from a tacit reverence for the sanctity of Aramis' person and office, or from his habit of respecting everything that exercised a moral influence upon him, a habit that had always made Porthos a model soldier and a first-rate comrade, — for all these reasons, we repeat, he retained a certain sort of reserve in the mansion of the prelate which D'Artagnan noticed particularly in his attitude toward the servants and guests.

However, this reserve did not go so far as to hinder him from asking questions. Porthos asked questions.

It was then learned that monseigneur had entered his private apartments and was preparing to show that he could be less majestic in the intimacy of social life than when in the presence of his flock.

In fact, after about a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos had spent in looking into the whites of each other's eyes and fumbling with their thumbs, a door opened and monseigneur came into view, completely attired in the undress costume of a prelate.

Aramis carried his head high, as became a man accustomed to command; his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his hand rested on his hip.

He retained his fine mustache and the long pointed chin beard of the days of Louis XIII.

He exhaled, as soon as he entered, that delicate perfume which in the case of elegant men and women of fashion never changes, and seems incorporated with the body, of which it has become, as it were, the natural emanation.

On the present occasion, however, the perfume had kept some of the religious sublimity of the incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect.

Aramis did not hesitate a moment, once he was in the apartment, and without uttering a word — for words, however cordial, would have seemed cold on such an occasion — he walked directly up to the musketeer so cleverly disguised as M. Agnan, and clasped him in his arms with a tenderness in which the most distrustful could not detect either indifference or affectation.

D'Artagnan returned the embrace with equal ardor.

Porthos clasped the delicate hand of Aramis in his huge hands, and D'Artagnan remarked that monseigneur extended his left hand to the giant, a custom of his probably, for Porthos had, very likely, injured the fingers that were covered with rings half a score of times by squeezing the flesh in the vice of his fist. Aramis may, therefore, have learned caution from painful experience, and so only presented flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed against gold or diamond facets.

During the two embraces Aramis looked D'Artagnan full in the face, then offered him a chair, and sat down himself in the shade, having first observed that the light fell directly on the face of his companion.

This manœuvre, familiar to diplomatists and women, is not unlike the advantage of the guard which duellists try to avail themselves of on the ground, so far as their skill or their training allows them.

But D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this artifice; however, he pretended not to perceive it. He felt that he had been caught, and, just because he was caught, he felt that he was on the road to a discovery. He was an old condottiere, and it did not trouble him much if he were apparently beaten, provided he plucked from his seeming defeat all the fruits of victory.

The conversation was opened by Aramis.

"Ah! my dear friend, my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what a lucky chance it was that brought you here!"

"It was the sort of a chance, most reverend comrade, which I prefer to call friendship," answered D'Artagnan. "I have been looking for you the last few days, as I have always been looking for you whenever I have any great enterprise to propose to you or an odd hour of freedom to devote to you."

"Ah! indeed!" said Aramis, composedly, "you have been seeking me?"

"Seeking you? Yes, my dear Aramis, he has been seeking you," interrupted Porthos, "and the proof of it is that he never stopped till he ran me down at Belle-Isle. Was it not friendly of him?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," returned Aramis; "at Belle-Isle, was it?"

"Capital!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "This blundering Porthos of mine has fired the first gun without ever dreaming of it."

"At Belle-Isle, was it?" repeated Aramis; "and it such a hole, such a desert! It was very friendly of him, indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

A slightly ironical smile flickered on D'Artagnan s lips.

"Oh, I knew you were here before that," said he; "but I wished to find out —"

"To find out what?"

"Whether our friendship of the olden time still held good; whether when we met, our hearts, though shrivelled up by age, could still give vent to the old, joyous cry that used to hail the coming of a friend."

"Well, and have you not been satisfied?" asked Aramis.

"Only middling."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, when I first saw Porthos, he said, 'Hush!' and when I first saw you —"

"Well, what did I do?"

"You gave me your blessing."

"But what else should I give you, my dear friend?" answered Aramis, with a smile. "A blessing is the most precious thing a poor prelate has to give."

"Oh, come, now, my friend."

"Undoubtedly it is."

"Yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are referring to temporal goods," said Aramis, with an air of indifference.

"Certainly I am. They are things I am rather partial to myself."

"In that case, we 'll speak of them, if you like," said Aramis, with another smile.

"Do you confess that you are one of the wealthiest prelates in France?"

"My dear fellow, as you insist on knowing the state of my account-book, I will tell you that the income of the bishopric of Vannes is twenty thousand livres, neither more nor less. It is a diocese with a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very nice," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb," said Porthos.

"However," continued D'Artagnan, with his eyes riveted on Aramis, "you don't intend to bury yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. I decline to admit that the word '*bury*' is used in its proper relation."

"But at this distance from Paris, it seems to me a person is buried, or very near it."

"My friend, I am growing old," answered Aramis. "The noise and bustle of the city no longer agree with me. When a man is fifty-seven, it is time for him to have recourse to calmness and meditation, and I have found them here. What can be at once more beautiful and more austere than this old Armorica of ours? I have discovered here, my dear D'Artagnan, everything that is the very reverse of that which I formerly loved, and that is what ought to happen at the end of life, which is the reverse of the beginning. A little of the pleasure of other days comes and greets me here occasionally, but does not turn me aside from the path of salvation. I be-

long still to this world, and yet every step I take draws me nearer to my God."

"Eloquent, wise, and prudent; you are an ideal prelate, Aramis, and I congratulate you."

"But, my dear friend," returned Aramis, smiling, "you did not come here to pay me compliments. Tell me, now, what is it that brings you hither? Is it possible that I can have the happiness of being useful to you in any way, no matter what?"

"No, thank heaven, my dear friend," replied D'Artagnan, "nothing of that sort brought me. I am rich and free."

"Rich?"

"Oh, rich for a person like me; not in your sense or in that of Porthos, of course. I have an income of fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him doubtfully. He could not believe, especially since D'Artagnan was dressed in such a humble garb, that his friend could have such a fine fortune.

Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the time for an explanation had come, told the story of his adventures in England.

During the narrative he could perceive that the eyes of the prelate flashed nearly a dozen times, while his dainty fingers worked convulsively.

As for Porthos, it was not merely admiration that he manifested for D'Artagnan — it was enthusiasm, delirium.

"Well," said D'Artagnan, at the close of his recital, "you see that I have friends and property in England and a treasure in France, all at your service should you ever need them. Now you know why I have come hither."

Steady as were his own eyes, there was something in the eyes of Aramis at this moment which he could not support. He allowed, therefore, his glance to wander until it rested upon Porthos — like the sword which yields to a pressure it cannot resist and turns in another direction.

"At all events, my dear friend," said the bishop, "you have adopted a singular travelling costume."

"I am well aware that it is frightful. You see I did not care to travel as a cavalier or a nobleman. The fact is that I have grown somewhat miserly since I became rich."

"And you say, then, that you came to Belle-Isle?" asked Aramis, abruptly.

"Yes," answered D'Artagnan, "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me there!" cried Aramis. "Why, during the whole year I have been here, I have never once crossed the sea!"

"Indeed!" returned D'Artagnan; "I was not aware you were such a stay-at-home."

"Ah! my dear friend, must I again tell you that I am no longer the man I was? Riding is painful to me, the sea wearies me. I am a poor ailing priest, constantly complaining and grumbling, and devoted to those austerities which seem to me to be the natural concomitants of old age, the preliminaries to a treaty with death. It is here I wish to die, my dear D'Artagnan."

"Well, so much the better, dear friend, as we shall probably be neighbors."

"Nonsense!" said Aramis, not without some degree of astonishment, which he did not try to conceal, "you my neighbor?"

"Why, yes, why not?"

"How can that be?"

"I am about to purchase certain valuable salt-pits which lie between Pirial and Le Croisic. Just think, my friend, the working of them will bring me in a clear income of twelve per cent. — a property that can never become unproductive, and never can entail useless expenses. The ocean will bring every six hours its tribute to my money-box, faithfully and regularly. I am the first Parisian who ever thought of such a speculation. Please don't let it go any further, though, and I'll communicate with you on the matter before long. I'm to have three leagues of the marshes for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis flashed a glance of inquiry at Porthos. Was all this really true? Was there not some snare lying hidden beneath this outward show of indifference? But soon, as if ashamed of depending on such a weak auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a new assault or a new defence.

"I have been told," said he, "that you had some quarrel or other with the court, but managed, as, indeed, you always do, to come out of it with all the honors of war."

"A quarrel with the court!" cried D'Artagnan, laughing to hide his embarrassment, for he was not sure but that the words of Aramis might indicate a knowledge of his late relations with the court. "So you have been told this? Why, what have you been told?"

"Yes, even I, a poor bishop, lost in these wilds, have

learned that the King had made you the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed again.

"Oh, I don't deny it."

"The King brought you one fine morning with him beyond the bridge of Blois to talk with his inamorata, did he not?"

"True," answered D'Artagnan. "So you know that, do you? Then you must know that, on that very day, I gave in my resignation."

"You are telling me the truth?"

"Never was truer word spoken, my friend."

"It was after that you went to visit the Comte de la Fère?"

"Yes."

"And also came to see me?"

"Yes."

"And Porthos?"

"Yes."

"And all to pay a mere visit?"

"No. I thought you had nothing to do, and I wanted to take you with me to England."

"Yes, I understand, and then, you wonderful man, you did yourself what you wished us four to do together. I surmised all along that you had some part in that glorious Restoration, especially when I was informed that you had been seen at the receptions of Charles II., and were treated by him as a friend or rather as a person to whom he was under particular obligation."

"But how the devil did you find out all that?" inquired D'Artagnan, who feared the investigations of Aramis might have extended further than was exactly desirable.

"Dear D'Artagnan," answered the prelate, "my friendship is not unlike the anxious solicitude of that night watchman we keep in the little tower at the end of the quay. The worthy man lights a lantern every night to guide the barks that are coming to us from the sea. He is hidden yonder in his little sentry-box, and the fishermen never see him; but he follows their every movement with interest, guesses at what they are doing. Calls to them, summons them to take the path that leads to the shelter of the haven. I resemble that watcher.

From time to time some scraps of information reach me and recall the memory of those I have loved. Then I follow those friends of other days across the stormy ocean of the world, I, the poor watcher to whom God has given the shelter of a sentry-box."

"And what did I do after leaving England?"

"Ah! now you would force me to strain my eyes. I know nothing of what occurred since your return, D'Artagnan; my sight is blurred. I thought you had forgotten me, and I wept over that forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again and to see you again is for me a source of the keenest enjoyment, I assure you. How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young ward?"

"Raoul?"

"Yes."

"I believe he has inherited the skill of his father Athos, and the strength of his guardian Porthos."

"And when were you enabled to draw that conclusion?"

"Why, on the very eve of my departure from Paris."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes, there was to be an execution on the Grève, and there was a riot on account of the execution. We happened to find ourselves in the thick of the riot, and it became necessary to use our swords. Raoul did wonders."

"Bah! What could a little fellow like him do?" said Porthos.

"In the first place he hurled a man through a window as if he had been a bale of cotton."

"Oh, that was really fine!" cried Porthos.

"Then he drew his sword and cut and thrust as well as ever we did in our best days."

"And what caused the riot?" inquired Porthos.

D'Artagnan noticed that the features of Aramis wore an air of utter indifference when this question was put.

"It was," he answered, with his eyes riveted on Aramis, "caused by the punishment of two revenue farmers, two friends of M. Fouquet, who had been compelled by the King to disgorge their plunder, and were now about to be hanged."

The only sign the prelate gave that he was listening was a slight contraction of the eyebrows.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"D'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you happen to be acquainted with these names, Aramis?"

"No," replied the bishop, contemptuously. "Names of financiers, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Oh! And has M. Fouquet allowed his friends to be hanged?" asked Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Because it seems to me —"

"If these wretches were hanged, it was by the King's order. Now, although M. Fouquet is superintendent of the finances, I don't imagine he has the right of life and death."

"That 's all very well," growled Porthos; "but if I were in M. Fouquet's place —"

Aramis saw that Porthos was likely to say something foolish. He thought it time to change the conversation.

"Come, my dear D'Artagnan," said he, "we have spoken enough about other people; let us talk a little about yourself."

"But you now know everything about me. On the contrary, my dear Aramis, I should like if we talked a little about you."

"Ah! my dear friend, I have already told you that Aramis no longer exists."

"Nor the Abbé d'Herblay?"

"Nor the Abbé d'Herblay, either. You see a man whom God took by the hand, and guided to a position beyond his merits and his expectations."

"God, was it?" queried D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Stay! that is strange! I was told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you so?" rejoined Aramis, who colored slightly in spite of all his powerful self-control.

"*Ma foi!* Bazin did."

"The idiot!"

"Oh, I never said he was a man of genius; but he told me, and I am simply repeating what he said."

"I never saw M. Fouquet in my life," said Aramis, with the serene, pure look of a virgin who says: "I have never told a lie."

"But," retorted D'Artagnan, "even if you had seen him, and known him, too, I don't see there would have been any

great harm in it. M. Fouquet is a very excellent sort of man."

"Indeed?"

"A great statesman."

Aramis made a gesture that denoted perfect indifference.

"A minister who is all powerful."

"I have nothing to do with any person in power except the Pope and the King," said Aramis.

"Oh, I suppose so, and I am only speaking of M. Fouquet," answered D'Artagnan, with his most innocent air, "because every one round here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's, the salt marshes I am about to purchase are M. Fouquet's, the island where Porthos has been practising topography is M. Fouquet's, the garrison is M. Fouquet's, the galleys are M. Fouquet's. It would not have surprised me, then, I confess, if you, or rather your diocese, were infeoffed to M. Fouquet. Of course he is not the same sort of master that the King is, but he is quite as powerful as a king."

"Thank God, I am infeoffed to nobody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own master," answered Aramis, who during this conversation was observant of D'Artagnan's every gesture, of Porthos' every glance.

But D'Artagnan was impassive and Porthos quite phlegmatic; the thrusts so skilfully aimed were parried by a skilful opponent; not one of them touched.

Nevertheless, both of the antagonists were beginning to feel tired out by such a struggle, and the announcement that supper was ready was well received by every one.

At supper the conversation took another direction. The prelate and the musketeer knew that they were each on guard, and that neither could win any advantage.

Porthos had not the slightest notion of what was going on. He had kept quietly in his place because Aramis made a sign to him not to stir. The supper was for him, therefore, simply a supper, and that was enough for Porthos.

And the supper went off very successfully. D'Artagnan was in a state of exuberant gayety. Aramis outdid himself in his gentle courtesy. Porthos ate like Pelops of old. Their talk was about finance, art, love.

Aramis assumed a look of artless astonishment whenever D'Artagnan ventured to speak of politics. He looked astonished so frequently that D'Artagnan's distrust increased, and

D'Artagnan's distrust, which he did not altogether conceal, provoked the distrust of Aramis in turn.

At length D'Artagnan dropped, casually but intentionally, the name of Colbert. He had kept this stroke in reserve for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" inquired the bishop.

"Oh! really, that is going a little too far!" D'Artagnan said to himself. "I must be on the look-out, *mordioux!* I must be on the look-out!"

And he gave Aramis all the information about Colbert he could desire.

The supper, or rather the conversation between Aramis and D'Artagnan, continued until one the next morning.

At ten o'clock to the minute Porthos had fallen asleep on his chair and was soon snoring like an organ. At midnight he was awakened and told to go to bed.

"Hum!" said he, "I think I have been near dozing. But I have been very much interested in your conversation."

At one o'clock Aramis escorted D'Artagnan to the chamber that had been prepared for him; it was the finest in the episcopal residence.

Two servants were placed at his orders.

"To-morrow," said the bishop to D'Artagnan, taking leave of him, "we will take a ride on horseback at eight o'clock with Porthos, if you have no objection."

"At eight!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "so late as that?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," answered Aramis.

"Yes, I am aware of that."

"Good-night, my dear friend."

And he gave the musketeer a warm embrace. D'Artagnan watched him leaving the apartment.

"Good!" said he, when Aramis had closed the door behind him, "I will be on my feet at five."

Having come to this determination, he went to bed, and slept twice as soundly as usual, to make up for lost time.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

IN WHICH PORTHOS IS SORRY THAT HE CAME WITH D'ARTAGNAN.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had been watching for the last sigh of the expiring candle in his friend's bed-chamber, crossed the corridor on tiptoe and passed into the room of Porthos.

The giant, who had retired about an hour and a half previously, lay majestically extended under the eider-down coverlet. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep which, in the case of Porthos, was proof against the ringing of bells and the roar of cannon. His head swam in that gentle oscillation which recalls the soothing motion of a ship. Porthos was on the point of dreaming.

The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis.

The prelate drew nigh the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened the sound of his steps; and besides, any sound, however loud, would have been lost in the snoring of Porthos.

He laid a finger on his shoulder.

"Up! my dear Porthos," said he, "up!"

The voice of Aramis was soft and kindly, but it was the medium of more than a notice; it was the medium of a command. His hand was light, but it indicated a danger.

Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis even in the depth of sleep.

He started.

"Who goes there?" he shouted, in stentorian tones.

"Hush! it is I," said Aramis.

"You, my dear friend; but why the devil did you wake me?"

"To tell you you must set out at once."

"Set out?"

"Yes."

"For where?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then fell back in a sitting position, fixing his big eyes in terror on Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues!"

"A hundred and four," answered the bishop.

"Mercy on us!" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like those children who struggle with their nurse to gain an hour or two more of sleep.

"A ride of thirty hours," said Aramis, resolutely. "You know you 'll have good relays."

Porthos stirred a leg and groaned.

"Come, come, my friend," insisted the prelate, impatiently.

Porthos pushed the other leg out of the bed.

"And is it absolutely necessary," said he, "that I should go?"

"Imperatively necessary."

Porthos then got on his legs, shaking the floor and walls with his tremendous footsteps.

"Easy, my dear Porthos, easy, for the love of God!" said Aramis. "You 'll wake some one."

"Ah, you 're right," answered Porthos, in a voice of thunder. "I was forgetting. But don't be alarmed; I will be cautious."

And so saying he dropped his belt, laden with his sword and pistols, and a purse from which the crowns escaped with a prolonged jingling.

The noise made the blood of Aramis boil, while it only drew from Porthos an ear-splitting roar of laughter.

"Funny, is n't it?" said he in the same tone.

"Lower, Porthos, lower, I beseech you."

"Of course I will," he answered.

And he lowered his voice a semitone.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "is n't it funny that a person is never so slow as when he is in a hurry, and never so noisy as when he wants to be silent?"

"Yes, yes, that 's quite true; but let us give the saying the lie, Porthos, and let us be in a hurry and silent also."

"You see I am doing my best," answered Porthos, passing on his breeches.

"Very well, Porthos."

"The matter in hand seems to be urgent?"

"More than urgent, Porthos; it may have the gravest consequences."

"Oho!"

"D'Artagnan has been questioning you, has he not?"

"Questioning me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not a bit of it!"

"You 're quite sure, Porthos?"

"Well, I should think so!"

"Oh, he must have. Try and remember."

"He asked me what I was busy at, I told him topography. I recollect I wanted to mention another word to him I heard you use one day, but could n't hit on it."

"Castrametation?"

"That 's it. I never can get the hang of it."

"So much the better. What did he ask you next?"

"Who was M. Gétard."

"And next?"

"Who was M. Jupenet."

"He did not happen to see our plan of the fortifications?"

"Yes, he did."

"The devil!"

"Oh, you need not be uneasy, I rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. He never could discover that you had given me any assistance in my labors."

"Our friend has very keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid that everything is discovered, Porthos; we must try, then, to prevent a very great misfortune. I have ordered my people to lock all the gates and doors, so D'Artagnan cannot start before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay at five in the morning and be gone fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then helped Porthos to dress, handing him garment after garment and fitting them on with a skill that would have done credit to the most dexterous valet. Porthos, confused and stupefied, made no resistance and was profuse in his apologies.

When he was ready Aramis took him by the hand and led him downstairs, making him place his foot cautiously on every step, preventing him from knocking against door-posts, turning him this way and that, as if he had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf.

The man who was nearly all soul fired and uplifted the man who was nearly all matter.

A horse was standing ready saddled in the court-yard.

Porthos mounted.

Then Aramis took the horse himself by the bridle, and led it over some dung scattered along the yard for the evident purpose of deadening any noise. He at the same time pinched the horse's nostrils to prevent it from neighing.

When they were at the outward gate, he drew close to Porthos, who was about to gallop off without even asking why he should do so.

"Now, friend Porthos," he whispered in his ear, "don't draw bridle until you are at Paris. Eat on horseback, drink on horseback, sleep on horseback, and don't waste a minute."

"That 's enough, I will not stop."

"Give this letter to M. Fouquet. He must have it at any cost before noon to-morrow."

"He shall have it."

"And keep one thing in your mind, my dear friend."

"What is it?"

"Remember you are riding after your duke and peer's patent."

"Oh!" cried Porthos, his eyes sparkling, "in such a case I could make the journey in twenty-four hours."

"Try it."

"Then let go my bridle. Forward, Goliath!"

Aramis let go, not the bridle, but the horse's nostrils. Porthos dug the rowels into his steed, and the maddened animal dashed off like lightning.

As long as Aramis could see Porthos through the darkness, he followed him with his eyes. Then, when he lost sight of him, he returned to the court-yard.

There was no sign of anything stirring in D'Artagnan's chamber. The servant who was watching at his door had not seen a light or heard a sound.

Aramis carefully shut his own door, sent the lackey to bed, and retired to rest himself.

D'Artagnan had really suspected nothing; and when he awoke in the morning, at about half-past four, he was sure that he had won all along the line. He ran in his shirt to look out of the window. The window opened on the court-yard. Yes, the day was breaking. The court-yard was deserted; even the hens had not yet quitted their roosts. Not a lackey was around.

All the gates were closed.

"Nothing could be better. Everything perfectly quiet,"

said D'Artagnan to himself. "I am evidently the first person to be up. Well, I had better dress, it will be so much gained."

And D'Artagnan dressed.

But this time he made no attempt to give to M. Agnan's costume the plain and almost priestly severity he had affected before. By buckling his belt tighter, by buttoning his coat in a certain fashion and sticking his hat a little more on the side of his head, he managed to restore to his person a little of that soldierly appearance the absence of which had astonished Aramis.

When he had finished dressing, he did not stand on any ceremony with his host, or at least pretended not to do so, and entered his bed-chamber without being announced.

Aramis was asleep, or else feigning sleep.

A large book lay open upon his night desk; the wax light was still burning on its silver tray. Certainly all this should have proved to D'Artagnan that the prelate was sleeping the peaceful sleep of innocence and would be imbued with the best intentions when he awoke.

The musketeer did exactly to the bishop what the bishop had done to Porthos. He struck him on the shoulder.

But it was evident our innocent prelate was only pretending to be asleep; for, instead of waking suddenly, — he who was such a light sleeper, — he did not open his eyes until he received a second tap.

"Ah! so it 's you," said he, stretching his arms, "what a pleasant surprise! *Ma foi*, my slumbers were nearly making me forget I had the happiness of entertaining you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," answered D'Artagnan, somewhat embarrassed. "It 's early, I believe. You see I still retain that confounded military habit of awaking with the dawn."

"Do you wish that we should start on our ride so soon?" inquired Aramis. "It strikes me as being very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to set out before eight."

"Possibly. But I had such a longing to see you that I said to myself: 'The earlier the better.'"

"And my seven hours' sleep!" exclaimed Aramis. "Take care; I had counted on them, and I must make up for the hours I had missed in the course of the day."

"But unless I have lost my memory, you used not to be so sleepy. You had hot blood in those days and could hardly ever be found in bed."

"And that is just the very reason why I like to stay in it now."

"Come, now, confess that it was not because you wanted to sleep you made that appointment for eight o'clock."

"I am always in dread you 'll laugh at me if I tell you the truth."

"Tell it, for all that."

"Well, I am in the habit of giving the hours between six and eight to my private devotions."

"Your private devotions ? "

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's religious exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearances than a simple priest."

"*Mordioux !* Aramis, that word makes me take a more favorable view of your high position in the church. Appearances ! Just the sort of word a musketeer might use. Capital ! Hurrah for appearances, Aramis ! "

"Instead of congratulating me, D'Artagnan, pray forgive me. It is a mundane expression that I let drop thoughtlessly."

"Then I must leave you now ? "

"If you please, dear friend ; I want to collect my thoughts and meditate."

"Very well ; I 'll leave you. But shorten your prayers for the sake of that pagan they call D'Artagnan, I entreat you. I want to have a talk with you."

"Well, for your sake, D'Artagnan, I 'll finish them in an hour and a half — "

"An hour and a half's devotions ! Ah ! my friend, be more moderate, make an easier bargain with me."

Aramis burst out laughing.

"Still charming, young, and gay," said he. "You have really come into my diocese to set me at odds with Heaven."

"Pshaw ! "

"And you know I have never been able to resist you. You will imperil my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan pursed up his lips.

"Come, now," said he, "I 'll shoulder your sin myself.

Just one sign of the cross to show you 're a Christian, and one *Pater*, and we 're off."

"Hush!" whispered Aramis, "we are not alone; there are strangers coming upstairs."

"Well, send them away."

"Impossible. I made an appointment with them yesterday. They are the principal of the Jesuit college and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff, I suppose. Well, it can't be helped."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I 'll go and knock up Porthos, and stay with him until you have finished your conference."

Aramis did not move, did not show the slightest sign of agitation by word or gesture.

"Go, then," said he.

D'Artagnan advanced toward the door.

"Cross the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thanks; *au revoir*."

And D'Artagnan proceeded in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Before ten minutes had elapsed he returned.

He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the Jesuit college: exactly in the same position in which he had once on a time discovered him at the inn of Crèvecœur.

This company did not frighten the musketeer.

"What is the matter?" said Aramis, tranquilly. "Have you something to say to me, my dear friend?"

"Yes," answered D'Artagnan, looking the bishop full in the face; "Porthos is not in his room."

"Really! Are you quite sure?" asked Aramis, calmly.

"I should think I am! I have just come from his chamber."

"Where can he be, do you think?"

"That is what I have come to ask you."

"You have n't made inquiries?"

"Oh, yes, I have."

"And what answers did you get?"

"I was told that Porthos often went out in the morning without saying anything to anybody, and that he had probably done so now."

"And what did you do then?"

"I went to the stable," replied D'Artagnan, unconcernedly.

"For what purpose?"

"To see if Porthos had left on horseback."

"And what did you find?"

"I found there was a horse missing, Goliath, at stall No. 5."

All this dialogue, it will be understood, was not free from a certain degree of affectation on the part of D'Artagnan, while the manner of Aramis was politeness itself.

"Oh, I see how it is," said Aramis, after thinking a moment. "Porthos went out with the object of giving us a surprise on his return."

"A surprise?"

"Yes. The canal between Vannes and the sea abounds in widgeon and snipe; they are the favorite game of Porthos; he's sure to bring us back a dozen or so for breakfast."

"You think so?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else could he have gone? I have n't the slightest doubt he took a gun with him."

"It 's possible," said D'Artagnan.

"The best thing you can do, my friend, is to take horse and join him."

"You 're right," answered D'Artagnan; "I 'll do so."

"Would you like to have a servant go with you?"

"No, thanks. I shall make inquiries on the way. Any one who has seen Porthos is sure to notice him."

"Take an arquebuse with you."

"Thanks."

"Order them to saddle any horse you fancy."

"I should like the one I rode yesterday coming from Belle-Isle."

"Just as you like; my house is yours."

Aramis touched the bell, and directed that whatever horse M. d'Artagnan selected should be saddled for him. D'Artagnan followed the servant who took the order.

At the door the servant stood aside to let D'Artagnan pass. At that moment his eye met the eye of his master. A contraction of the eyebrows told the intelligent spy that D'Artagnan was to be allowed to do whatever he wished.

D'Artagnan mounted. Aramis heard the rattle of the horse's hoofs on the pavement.

The servant returned a few moments later.

"Well?" inquired the prelate.

"Monseigneur, he is following the canal and going toward the sea," answered the servant.

"Good!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, who had laid aside all his suspicions, was galloping in the direction of the ocean, hoping every moment to get a glimpse of the colossal figure of his friend Porthos on the moors or on the beach. He fancied he recognized the print of a horseshoe in every mark made on the soft ground. Sometimes he imagined he heard the echo of a gunshot. These illusions lasted for two hours.

Then he started for the house.

"We must have passed each other," he thought, "and I am sure to find him and Aramis waiting for my return.

But D'Artagnan was mistaken. He could not get a sight of Porthos any more at the bishop's residence than he could along the canal.

Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking almost heartbroken.

"Did you meet none of my servants, my dear D'Artagnan?" he cried, as soon as he saw him.

"No. Did you send any one after me?"

"I am in despair, my dear friend, at sending you on such a pootless journey; but the chaplain of Saint-Paterne came here about seven. He met Du Vallon, who had left the house some time before. Our friend did not like to awaken any of us, but he requested the chaplain to tell me that, as he was afraid M. Gétard might commit some blunder in his absence, he had determined to take advantage of the tide and run over to Belle-Isle."

"Still, I cannot very well see how Goliath was able to gallop over twelve miles of water."

"Eighteen, my friend," said Aramis.

"That renders it less probable, even."

"You are quite right, my friend," answered the prelate, with his gentle smile, "and so Goliath is in his stable, very well pleased, I'll wager, at no longer having Porthos on his back."

The horse, in fact, had been brought back from the place where the relay was waiting for Porthos by order of the bishop, who attended to every detail, however minute.

D'Artagnan appeared to be perfectly satisfied with this explanation.

And now he entered upon a course of dissimulation that was the natural result of the suspicions which were growing every moment stronger in his mind.

He sat between the Jesuit and Aramis at breakfast, with the Dominican in front of him. He was pleased with the Dominican's kindly, fat face, and smiled at him pleasantly. The repast was long and sumptuous; it consisted of choice Spanish wines, fine oysters from Morbihan, delicious fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimboeuf, and the exquisite game of the moors.

D'Artagnan ate much and drank little. Aramis did not drink at all, or at least drank only water.

Then when breakfast was finished:

"You offered me an arquebuse?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, lend it to me."

"You are going hunting?"

"Yes, I don't know what I could do better while waiting for Porthos."

"Take any one you like from the trophy."

"Will you come with me?"

"Alas! dear friend, nothing would please me better, but bishops are not allowed to hunt."

"Ah!" returned D'Artagnan, "I was not aware of that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy until noon."

"Then I must go alone?" said D'Artagnan.

"Unfortunately for me, yes; but be sure to be back in time for dinner."

"You may depend on that. The fare is so excellent here that it would take a good deal to hinder me from returning."

And thereupon D'Artagnan rose, bowed to the guests, and took an arquebuse; but instead of going shooting, he made straight for the little harbor of Vannes. He looked round cautiously to see if he were followed. He saw nobody, nothing to alarm him. He hired a little fishing-boat for twenty-five livres, and started at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed.

Nor had he been followed, either. But a Jesuit brother, aloft in the tower of his church, aided by an excellent glass, had not lost a single one of his movements since morning. At a quarter to twelve Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing toward Belle-Isle.

When the musketeer drew near the coast, he examined it with eager curiosity. His eyes wandered from the shore to the fortifications and from the fortifications back again to the shore, trying to see if the brilliant costume of Porthos and his gigantic stature might be standing out against the cloudy sky.

But all his efforts were vain; he landed without having seen any sign of him, and was informed by the first soldier he met that M. du Vallon had not returned from Vannes.

Then, without losing a moment, he ordered the master of his little boat to set the sail for Sarzeau.

We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day; the wind had passed from the north-north-east to the south-east. The wind was, therefore, almost as favorable for the return to Sarzeau as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had touched the continent, and in two hours more he was at Vannes.

In spite of the quickness of his passage, the vessel's deck, upon which he tramped up and down for three hours, could alone tell all the vexation he endured during the journey.

D'Artagnan cleared the distance between the quay and the bishop's residence almost at a bound.

He expected to frighten Aramis by his speedy return, and intended to upbraid him with his duplicity, with a certain amount of reserve, indeed, but with spirit enough to alarm him for the consequences of that duplicity, and thus wrest from him a part of his secret.

But when he entered the hall, he found his further advance barred by the bishop's valet de chambre, who met him with a sanctimonious smile.

"I want to see monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, trying to pass by the valet.

The valet was for a moment a little confused, but quickly recovered his coolness.

"Monseigneur?" he repeated.

"Of course. Don't you recognize me, you idiot?"

"Undoubtedly. You are the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Well, then, let me pass."

"It would be useless, monsieur."

"Why?"

"Because monseigneur is not at home."

"What do you say? Monseigneur not at home! Where is he, then?"

"He has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know. But perhaps monseigneur will tell you, M. le Chevalier."

"How? Where? In what manner?"

"In this letter, which he ordered me to deliver to you, M. le Chevalier."

"Give it to me, you knave," cried D'Artagnan, tearing it out of his hand.

And this was what he read:

"*Dear Friend:*

"*I have been compelled by a case of the most urgent necessity to visit one of the parishes in my diocese. I had hoped to see you before my departure. But I gave up the hope when I reflected that you would be sure to spend two or three days in Belle-Isle with our dear Porthos.*

"*I hope you will enjoy yourself; but take care not to hold out against him at table. This is a caution which I would not have thought it necessary to give to Athos, even in the full brightness and vigor of his youth.*

"*Adieu, my dear friend. Believe me I sincerely regret it has not been in my power to have had the advantage of your excellent society for a longer period.*"

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I am nicely fooled. Ah! driveller, numskull, triple fool that I am! But he laughs best who laughs last. Oh! duped! duped! like a monkey cheated with an empty nutshell!"

And after landing a sound box on the nose of the still smiling valet, he rushed out of the house.

Furet was an excellent trotter, but he was not the steed that present circumstances demanded.

D'Artagnan made his way to the posting stables and selected a horse; he afterward demonstrated with the aid of good spurs and a light hand that the stag is not the swiftest runner in creation.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN RUNS, PORTHOS SNORES, AND ARAMIS COUNSELS.

About thirty or thirty-five hours after the events we have just recorded, while M. Fouquet was at work in the study of his château at Saint-Mandé, — with which we are already acquainted, — having, according to his custom, given strict orders that he should not be disturbed, a carriage drawn by four horses streaming with sweat entered the court-yard at full gallop.

This carriage was probably expected, for three or four lackeys at once hurried up and opened the portière. Thereupon M. Fouquet left his desk and ran to the window, and a man, evidently in pain, got out of the carriage, leaning on the shoulders of two of the lackeys and descending the three carriage steps with difficulty.

He had hardly mentioned his name when the lackey upon whom he was not leaning ran back to the house and was lost in the hall. He had gone to announce the new arrival to his master; but he had no need to knock at the door of his master's study.

Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur the Bishop of Vannes!" said the lackey.

"Very well," answered Fouquet.

Then leaning over the banisters of the stairs, the first steps of which Aramis was ascending:

"You, my dear friend," he exclaimed; "you, so soon?"

"Yes, monsieur, it is I; but all broken up and battered, as you see."

"My poor dear friend!" said Fouquet, offering his arm, upon which Aramis leaned, the servants drawing back respectfully.

"Oh, it is nothing," returned Aramis, "now that I am here; the getting here was the main thing, and I have got here."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, shutting the door of the study behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Most assuredly we are."

"No one can listen to us? No one can hear us?"

"No one; you need not be alarmed."

"Has M. du Vallon arrived?"

"Yes."

"So you got my letter?"

"Yes. The matter is apparently serious, since your presence in Paris has become necessary at a time when it was so urgently needed elsewhere."

"You are right. It could not be more serious."

"Thank you for coming, then. What has happened? But for God's sake, my dear friend, before you utter a word, take time to breathe. You are frightfully pale!"

"I am, indeed, in great pain; but in God's name do not trouble yourself about me. Did M. du Vallon say anything to you when he gave you the letter?"

"No; I heard a great noise and went to the window; I saw just in front of the doorsteps a cavalier who looked as if he were made of marble; I ran down to meet him; he gave me a letter and then his horse fell down dead."

"And the rider?"

"Fell with the horse. He was taken up and carried to an apartment. After I had read the letter I visited him with the view of obtaining fuller information, but he slept so heavily that it was impossible to awake him. I took pity on him and ordered the servants to take off his boots and then leave him."

"Very well. And now to the main question, monseigneur. You have seen M. d'Artagnan at Paris, have you not?"

"Undoubtedly. He is a very able man, and a very honest one, too, although he has been the cause of the death of our dear friends Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Alas! yes, I know it. I met the courier at Tours who was bringing me Gourville's letter and Pellisson's despatches. Have you thought deeply on that event, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"And concluded that it was a direct attack on your sovereignty?"

"Is that really your opinion?"

"Yes, it certainly is."

"Well, I must confess the same gloomy idea occurred to me also."

"For God's sake, monsieur, do not try to deceive yourself. Listen. To return to D'Artagnan. What was the occasion of your seeing him?"

"He came to me for money."

"From whom was the order for it?"

"From the King."

"From the King directly?"

"It bore his Majesty's signature."

"Ah! everything is plain! Well, D'Artagnan came to Belle-Isle; he was disguised, and pretended to be some steward or other sent by his master to buy salt-pits. Now, D'Artagnan's only master is the King; it was the King, therefore, who sent him. He saw Porthos."

"Porthos? Who is Porthos?"

"Excuse me, I made a mistake. He saw M. du Vallon at Belle-Isle, and he knows that Belle-Isle is fortified as well as you and I do."

"And you believe he was sent by the King?" asked Fouquet, anxiously.

"Most certainly he was."

"And that D'Artagnan, in the hands of the King, is a dangerous weapon?"

"The most dangerous that can be imagined."

"Then the conclusion I came to as soon as I saw him was wise."

"What do you mean?"

"That I must attach him to myself."

"If you came to the conclusion that he is the bravest, keenest, and most adroit man in France, you have judged correctly."

"We must have him at any price!"

"D'Artagnan?"

"Don't you agree with me?"

"Yes, if it were possible; but you will not have him."

"Why?"

"Because we have let the time for that slip by. He had a quarrel with the court; we should have taken advantage of that quarrel. Since then he has been in England; since then he has been a potent factor in bringing about the Restoration; since then he has gained a fortune, and, to clinch the matter, since then he has entered the King's service. If he has entered the King's service, you may rest assured he has been well paid for doing so."

"Oh, that 's nothing, we 'll pay him more."

"Pardon me, monsieur. When D'Artagnan has once pledged his word, he will keep that word forever."

"What do you deduce from that?" said Fouquet, uneasily.

"That at this very moment we must be ready to parry a terrible stroke."

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Stay — D'Artagnan is now on his way to render the King an account of his mission."

"Oh, we have plenty of time to think of that."

"Why do you say so?"

"You must have got the start of him considerably, I imagine."

"By about ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours —"

Aramis shook his pale head.

"You see yon cloud that sweeps across the heavens, yon swallows that cut the air? D'Artagnan is fleeter than cloud or bird, for D'Artagnan is like the wind that bears them onward."

"Oh, nonsense!"

"I tell you, monsieur, that there is something superhuman about that man; he and I are of the same age, and I have known him for thirty-five years."

"Well?

"Well, pay attention to my calculation, monsieur: I despatched M. du Vallon two hours after midnight; M. du Vallon had the start of me by eight hours. When did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"Nearly four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I have gained four hours upon him, and yet Porthos is a splendid horseman. He left eight horses dead on the road — I came on their bodies, one after the other. Now, I rode post for fifty leagues; but I have the gout, the gravel, any number of diseases, so that I cannot bear excessive fatigue. I was consequently compelled to dismount at Tours. Since then I have rolled along in a carriage, more dead than alive, flung now on the sides, now on the back of it, and always borne onward by four maddened horses in a furious gallop. Well, I have arrived, have gained four hours on Porthos. But just consider this: D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundred pounds, like Porthos; D'Artagnan has not the gout and gravel, like me; and consider that, in fact, he is more than a horseman, he is a centaur, is D'Artagnan. Supposing D'Artagnan to have started for Belle-Isle when I

started for Paris, in spite of the ten hours' start I have had of him, D'Artagnan will be here two hours after me."

"Ah, but you do not allow for accidents".

"They never affect him."

"But if his horses should break down?"

"He can run faster than a horse."

"Good heavens! what a man!"

"A man, indeed! a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he is the highest exemplar of human capability. But, though loving and admiring him as I do, I fear him, am always on my guard against him. However, to come to the point, monsieur; in two hours D'Artagnan will be here; be beforehand with him, run to the Louvre, see the King before the King sees D'Artagnan."

"And what am I to say to the King?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh! M. d'Herblay, M. d'Herblay! All our plans brought to naught in a moment!"

"Where one plan fails, another may succeed. We must never despair. But go, monsieur, go at once."

"And this garrison that has been so carefully selected: why, the King will change it immediately!"

"This garrison was the King's, monsieur, when it entered Belle-Isle. It is yours now, and every garrison that takes its place will be yours a fortnight later. Let things go on, monsieur. Do you think it will be to your disadvantage to have an entire army of your own at the end of a year instead of having only one or two regiments? Do you not see that the garrison you have now will gain you partisans if stationed at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, or wherever it may be sent? Go to the King, monsieur, go! Time is passing, and while we are losing our time, D'Artagnan is flying along the highway like an arrow."

"M. d'Herblay, you know that every word of yours is a germ that bears fruit as soon as it enters my mind. I will go to the Louvre."

"And at once?"

"Just as soon as I have changed my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan is not obliged to pass by Saint-Mandé, and will ride directly to the Louvre. That will take away an hour from the two hours left us."

"D'Artagnan hasn't my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes."

And without losing a second Fouquet ordered the horses to be put to. Aramis had barely time to say to him:

"Let your return be as speedy as your departure; I shall look for it impatiently."

Five minutes later Fouquet was flying toward Paris. During this time Aramis expressed a wish to be conducted to the om in which Porthos was sleeping.

When he reached the door of Fouquet's study, he was clasped in the arms of Pellisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to meet him.

Aramis responded to this warm yet respectful greeting with the dignified amiability he knew so well how to assume. But, suddenly stopping on the landing:

"What sounds are those I hear over yonder?" he inquired.

The noise that came to his ears was like the hoarse, deep growl of a hungry tiger or an angry lion.

"Oh, that's nothing," answered Pellisson, with a smile.

"Yes, but what is it?"

"It is M. du Vallon snoring."

"Ah, I should have known it. No one else is capable of producing such a sound. Will you permit me, Pellisson, to find out whether he wants for anything?"

"And will you permit me to accompany you?"

"Of course!"

Both of them entered the apartment.

Porthos lay stretched on the bed; his face was violet rather than red, his eyes swollen, and his mouth wide open. The roars that escaped from his deep chest shook the glass in the windows. The strained and bulging muscles of his face, his hair matted with sweat, the energetic movements of his chin and shoulders, were all calculated to arouse a certain degree of admiration: there is something almost divine in strength when it has reached to such a degree as this.

His herculean legs and feet had swelled and burst through the leather of his boots, and his enormous body had become as rigid as if it were formed of stone. There was no more motion in Porthos than there is in the granite giant that lies on the plain of Agrigentum.

Pellisson ordered one of the lackeys to cut his boots, for no power on earth would have been able to pull them off.

Four lackeys had essayed it in vain, tugging at them as if they were capstans.

They had not even awakened Porthos.

They now cut the leather off, strip by strip, and his legs fell back again on the bed. They dealt in the same way with the rest of his clothing, carried him to a bath, left him in it for a full hour, put clean linen on him, and replaced him in his bed, which had been warmed in the meantime. The aches and pains he must have suffered from these operations might have aroused a corpse; but they did not make Porthos open an eye or affect for a second the formidable organ which was the medium of his snores.

On the other hand, Aramis, whose temperament was dry and nervous, but whose courage was invincible, tried to defy weariness and to work with Gourville and Pellisson. He fainted, however, on the chair upon which he had persisted in remaining.

He was carried into the next room, and after staying in bed for a while, recovered his normal calm.

CHAPTER LXXV.

IN WHICH FOUQUET ACTS.

Meanwhile M. Fouquet was making for the Louvre with all the speed of which his English horses were capable.

The King was at work with Colbert.

All at once the King became pensive. The two sentences of death he had signed just after ascending the throne sometimes came back to his memory. They looked to him like two black stains when his eyes were open; like two bloody stains when his eyes were shut.

"Monsieur," said he, "after all, I am beginning to think that the two men you persuaded me to condemn were not such great criminals."

"Sire, the farmers of the revenue had to be decimated, and they were picked out of the herd."

"Picked out by whom?"

"By necessity, Sire," answered Colbert, coldly.

"Necessity! A great word, that!" murmured the young King.

"A great goddess, Sire."

"They were devoted to the superintendent, were they not?"

"Yes, Sire; friends who would have given their lives for M. Fouquet."

"And they have given them, monsieur."

"That is true, Sire; but fortunately their lives have been of no use to him, and that was far from their intention."

"How much money did these men appropriate?"

"About ten millions, of which six have been confiscated."

"And this money is in my coffers?" inquired the King in a tone that implied some slight degree of disgust.

"They are, Sire. However, this confiscation, though a menace to M. Fouquet, does not affect him."

"What do your words imply, monsieur?"

"If M. Fouquet has raised a band of rioters to save his friends from punishment, he will be sure to raise an army when the person to be saved from punishment is himself."

The King hurled at his confidant one of those looks that resemble the lightning flashes of a thunder-storm, one of those looks that lay bare the darkest secrets of the conscience.

"It surprises me," said he, "that thinking as you do of M. Fouquet, you have never advised me how to act."

"Advised you as to what, Sire?"

"In the first place, M. Colbert, tell me, clearly and precisely, what you think."

"Think of what?"

"Of M. Fouquet's conduct."

"I think, Sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with keeping under his own control the money of the state and thus despoiling your Majesty of a portion of your power, as M. Mazarin did, is also desirous of keeping under his control all those people who are fond of a life of indolence and pleasure, all those who are enamored of what idlers call poetry and statesmen call corruption; I think that by keeping your Majesty's subjects in his pay he encroaches on the royal prerogative, and I think that, if this continue, he will soon place your Majesty in the rank of weak and obscure princes."

"And what name do you give to such projects as these, monsieur?"

"M. Fouquet's projects, Sire?"

"Yes."

"They are called crimes of high treason, Sire."

"And what is done to criminals guilty of high treason?"

"They are arrested, tried, and punished."

"You are quite sure M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?"

"I will say more, Sire, I will say that he has already begun to execute it."

"Well, then, to return to what I was saying, M. Colbert."

"You were saying, Sire?"

"Give me your advice."

"Pardon me, Sire, but before I do so I should wish to add something more."

"What is it?"

"A palpable, evident, and material proof of treason."

"Well?"

"I have just learned that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle-Isle."

"Ah! you are sure?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Quite sure?"

"Perfectly sure, Sire. Do you know that there are soldiers at Belle-Isle?"

"No, *ma foi!* And you?"

"I do not know, either. I thought of asking your Majesty, therefore, to send some one to Belle-Isle."

"Whom should I send?"

"Myself, if your Majesty is willing."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Find out whether, like the old feudal lords, M. Fouquet has been supplying his walls with breastworks and battlements."

"But what could be his object in doing so?"

"To defend himself, some day or other, against his King."

"Why, if that be the case, M. Colbert, we must do immediately what you have just mentioned — we must have M. Fouquet arrested."

"Impossible!"

"I thought I had already told you that those who serve me must never use that word."

"Those who serve you cannot hinder M. Fouquet from being superintendent general."

"What follows?"

"It follows that, on account of that office, he has the entire parliament on his side, just as he has the entire army on his

side on account of his largesses, all the literary men on account of his favors, and all the nobility on account of his gifts."

"So that I am helpless, so far as M. Fouquet is concerned?"

"Absolutely helpless, Sire."

"You are an unprofitable adviser, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, Sire! for I will do something more than merely point out the danger to your Majesty."

"Indeed! Then please point out a means by which this Colossus may be undermined!" said the King with a bitter laugh.

"Money has made him great; let money destroy him, Sire."

"You mean I ought to deprive him of his office?"

"That would be a bad way of acting."

"Then show me a good one."

"Ruin him, ruin him, Sire, I tell you."

"But how can I do so?"

"Opportunities will not be wanting, make use of them."

"Mention some of them."

"Well, here is one of them. His royal Highness Monsieur is about to marry, and his wedding should be magnificent. It is a splendid opportunity for asking M. Fouquet for a million. Surely M. Fouquet, who can pay out twenty thousand livres where only five thousand were asked for, will have no difficulty in complying with your Majesty's request."

"Very good, I will ask for it."

"If your Majesty will sign the order, I shall go for the money myself."

And Colbert placed a sheet of paper before the King and handed him a pen.

At that moment an usher half opened the door and announced the superintendent.

Louis turned pale.

Colbert dropped the pen and started back from the King, over whom he had, like an angel of darkness, been spreading his black wings.

The superintendent entered like one of those courtiers who can take in a situation at a single glance.

The present one was not very encouraging for Fouquet, however conscious he might be of his strength. Colbert's little black eyes, dilated by envy, and Louis XIV.'s large, limpid

eyes, inflamed by anger, gave him full notice that he was in imminent danger.

In respect to court rumors, courtiers may be compared to those old soldiers who can distinguish, through the whispering of the wind and the rustling of the leaves, the far-away echoes of the tramp of armed men, can tell pretty closely, after listening for a while, the number of soldiers marching, of arms resounding, of cannon rolling.

Fouquet had only, then, to question the silence produced by his appearance: it was big with threatening revelations.

The King did not utter a word until the superintendent had advanced to the middle of the apartment. Some remnant of his youthful bashfulness held him back for a moment. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

"Sire," said he, "I have been impatient to see your Majesty."

"And why?" asked Louis.

"To bring you a piece of good news."

Colbert, although without Fouquet's personal distinction and greatness of heart, resembled him in many points. He had the same penetration, the same knowledge of men, but he had also a quality which Fouquet did not possess, and which is in itself a mighty force; that power of contraction which gives the hypocrite time to reflect and gather himself together for a spring.

He surmised that Fouquet was come to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes gleamed.

"What is the nature of this news?" inquired the King.

Fouquet laid down a roll of papers on the table.

"Will your Majesty be graciously pleased to cast your eyes over this paper?" said he.

The King slowly unfolded the document.

"Plans?" he asked.

"Yes, Sire."

"And what plans are they?"

"The plans of a new fortress, Sire?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the King; "so you take an interest in tactics and strategy, M. Fouquet?"

"I take an interest in all that may be useful to your Majesty," replied Fouquet.

"Remarkably fine drawings," said the King, examining them.

"Your Majesty, of course, understands them," returned Fouquet, bending over the paper: "this is the circle of the wall, these are the forts, and these the outworks."

"And what is this, monsieur?"

"That is the sea."

"The sea all round here?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Then what is the name of the place of which you are showing me the plan?"

"Belle-Isle-en-Mer, Sire," answered Fouquet, quietly.

At this word, this name, Colbert started so violently that the King turned round to enjoin him to be more prudent.

But Fouquet did not seem in the least excited by the movement made by Colbert or the gesture made by the King.

"So, monsieur," continued Louis, "you have caused Belle-Isle to be fortified?"

"Yes, Sire, and I have brought the estimates and accounts for your Majesty's inspection," replied Fouquet. "I have spent sixteen hundred thousand livres on the work."

"But why have you done so?" coldly inquired Louis, who had just been prompted by a malignant glance of the intendant.

"My object can be easily understood," answered Fouquet. "Your Majesty has been on bad terms with Great Britain."

"Yes; but since the restoration of Charles II., I have become her ally."

"Undoubtedly, a month ago, Sire; but it is nearly six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun."

"Then they are useless now."

"Fortifications are never useless, Sire. I had fortified Belle-Isle against Monk and Lambert and all those worthy tradesmen of London who were playing at being soldiers. But Belle-Isle will also remain fortified against the Dutch, with whom either your Majesty or the King of England is pretty sure to be at war soon."

The King again became silent and looked askance at Colbert.

"Belle-Isle, I think, belongs to you, M. Fouquet?" he at length added.

"No, Sire."

"Then to whom does it belong?"

"To your Majesty."

Colbert was as panic-stricken as if a gulf had opened at his feet.

Louis gave a start of admiration, either for Fouquet's genius or for his devotion.

"Explain yourself, monsieur," said he.

"Nothing easier, Sire. Belle-Isle is one of my estates. I have fortified it at my own expense. But as there is no reason in the world why a subject should not make a humble present to his sovereign, I offer to your Majesty this property, hoping that you will let me enjoy the usufruct of it. Belle-Isle, being a fortress, should be occupied by the King. From henceforth your Majesty can keep a garrison in it."

Colbert found it almost impossible to prevent himself from slipping on the polished floor; he had to cling to the columns of the wainscoting.

"This proves that you have attained great skill in the art of war, monsieur," said Louis XIV.

"Sire, the initiative is not mine," replied Fouquet. "I have been favored with suggestions from many officers, and the plans themselves were drawn up by one of our most distinguished engineers."

"His name?"

"M. du Vallon."

"M. du Vallon?" repeated Louis. "I do not know him. It is really annoying, M. Colbert, that I should not be acquainted with the distinguished men who reflect honor on my reign."

And while saying these words he turned to Colbert.

The unfortunate intendant felt utterly crushed; the sweat rolled down his face, he could not speak; his agony was indescribable.

"You will remember that name," added the King.

Colbert bent low, paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace.

Fouquet continued:

"The masonry is of Roman cement, made for me by architects who followed the directions given in works of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" inquired Louis.

"Oh, Sire, that is a matter that concerns your Majesty. It would not be proper for me to furnish my residence with cannon unless your Majesty had told me you considered that residence to be yours."

Louis was beginning to waver irresolutely between the hatred

with which this powerful man inspired him and the pity he felt for that other dejected man who yet seemed but the caricature of the person who was addressing him.

But his consciousness of his duty as a king got the better of his feelings as a man.

He laid his finger on the paper.

"The execution of these plans must have cost you a large sum of money," said he.

"I thought I had the honor of mentioning the amount to your Majesty," answered Fouquet.

"Mention it again, I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres! You must be enormously rich, M. Fouquet."

"It is your Majesty who is rich," replied Fouquet, "since Belle-Isle is now yours."

"Yes, thanks; but, however rich I may be, M. Fouquet —"

The King paused.

"Well, Sire?" inquired the superintendent.

"I foresee that I shall soon want money."

"You, Sire?"

"Yes, I."

"And at what time?"

"To-morrow, very likely."

"Would your Majesty do me the honor to be more explicit?"

"My brother is about to marry the Princess Royal of England."

"Yes, Sire?"

"Well, it is my duty to give her such a reception as befits the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"Certainly, Sire."

"And to do so needs money."

"Most undoubtedly."

"And I shall, therefore, require —"

Louis XIV. hesitated.

The sum he was about to ask was the sum he had been compelled to refuse Charles II. He turned to Colbert, wishing the blow to come from him.

"I shall require to-morrow —" he repeated, with his eyes on Colbert.

"A million," said the intendant, bluntly, delighted at having an opportunity for retaliation.

Fouquet turned his back on Colbert, and waited until the King repeated, or, rather, murmured:

"A million."

"Oh, Sire," answered the superintendent, scornfully, "only a million! What can your Majesty do with a million?"

"Still, I think that —"

"Why, it is about the sum expended at the wedding of a petty German prince."

"Monsieur —"

"Your Majesty will need two millions at the very least. The horses alone will run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your Majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening."

"What!" exclaimed the King, "sixteen hundred thousand livres?"

"Excuse me, Sire," said Fouquet, without even noticing Colbert, "I am aware that four hundred thousand livres are needed to complete the sum I mentioned. That gentleman, however, who is one of the intendants," — and he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder at Colbert, who was livid, — "has nine hundred thousand livres of mine in his chests."

The King turned round and stared at Colbert.

"But —" said the latter.

"That gentleman," interrupted Fouquet, still speaking at Colbert rather than to him, "received sixteen hundred thousand livres a week ago; he paid out a hundred thousand for the guards, seventy-five thousand for the hospitals, twenty-five thousand for the Swiss, a hundred and thirty thousand for provisions, a thousand for arms, and ten thousand for incidental expenses; I am not likely to be deceived, therefore, in reckoning that nine hundred thousand livres are still left."

Then turning to Colbert in the fashion in which the imperious chief of a department turns to a subordinate:

"See to it, monsieur," said he, "that these nine hundred thousand livres are remitted to his Majesty this evening in gold."

"But," returned the King, "that will make two and a half million of livres?"

"Sire, the additional half million will serve as pocket money for his Highness. You have heard me, M. Colbert? This evening, before eight o'clock."

And after a profound inclination to the King, the superin-

tendent retired backwards, never honoring with even a look the envious man he had so completely taken down.

Colbert in his fury tore his lace ruffles, and bit his lips until they bled.

Fouquet had hardly reached the threshold when the usher, pushing past him, cried:

"A courier for his Majesty from Bretagne!"

"M. d'Herblay was right," murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; "an hour and fifty-five minutes! It was time!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN FINDS HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

The reader knows already who the person was that the usher announced as "a courier from Bretagne."

This courier was easily recognizable.

It was D'Artagnan; D'Artagnan with his clothes covered with dust, his face crimson, his hair dripping with perspiration, his legs stiff. It was only by a painful effort that he succeeded in raising his feet to each of the steps that rang with the jingling of his bloody spurs.

He perceived the superintendent as soon as he reached the threshold. Fouquet saluted with a smile the man who, if he had arrived an hour sooner, would have been the harbinger of his downfall or of his death.

D'Artagnan found in his goodness of heart and in his vigor of body enough presence of mind to recall the courteous reception he had met at the hands of this man. He therefore returned his salutation, moved thereto more by good will and compassion than by respect.

He felt on his lips that word which had been so often repeated to the Duc de Guise:

"Fly!"

But the utterance of that word would have been the betrayal of a cause; to pronounce that word in the King's cabinet and in an usher's presence would have been to ruin himself uselessly without saving anybody.

Therefore he contented himself with saluting Fouquet and passed him in silence.

At this moment the King was distracted by two feelings: astonishment at Fouquet's last words and pleasure at D'Artagnan's return.

Although D'Artagnan was not a courtier, his penetration was as sure and swift as if he had been one. The moment he entered the room, he read the overwhelming humiliation that was stamped on the features of Colbert. He even heard the words that were uttered by the King:

"So, M. Colbert, you had nine hundred thousand livres of the superintendent's money in your office?"

Colbert was stifling; he bowed, but did not answer.

The whole scene entered the mind of D'Artagnan both through his eyes and through his ears.

Louis XIV.'s first word to his musketeer was an affectionate "Good-day," as if he were desirous of offering a contrast to the words he had just spoken.

His second word was a dismissal for Colbert, who passed out of the royal apartment, livid and tottering, while D'Artagnan twisted the ends of his mustache.

"I like to see one of my servants in such a state of disorder," said the King, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"Really, Sire," answered D'Artagnan, "I thought my presence at the Louvre was a matter of sufficient urgency to excuse me for appearing before you in such a condition."

"You are bringing me great news, then, monsieur?" inquired the King, with a smile.

"Sire, it may be summed up in a few words. Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified. Belle-Isle has a double circuit of walls, a citadel, and two detached forts; three privateers are anchored in its harbor, and its coast batteries are only waiting for their cannon."

"I know all that, monsieur," replied the King.

"Eh! your Majesty knows all that?" returned the amazed musketeer.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the King.

"Your Majesty has the plan of—"

"There it is."

"It is, certainly. I saw a similar one when I was in the island."

D'Artagnan's face darkened.

"THIS IS YOUR COMMISSION AS CAPTAIN OF MUSKETEERS, M. D'ARTAGNAN."

"Ah! I understand. I have not been the only one your Majesty has trusted, and you have sent some one else there," he rejoined, in a bitterly reproachful tone.

"Now that I know what I know, what does it matter how I came to know it?"

"Oh, very well, Sire," retorted the musketeer, not making the slightest effort to conceal his indignation. "Your Majesty will, however, be pleased to permit me to say that it was scarcely worth your while to make me run such a race and risk breaking my neck a score of times, and all for the purpose of greeting me on my arrival with such tidings. Sire, when a man is distrusted, or deemed inefficient, he ought not to be employed."

And D'Artagnan, with soldier-like abruptness, stamped on the floor, leaving behind him some of the blood-stained dust from his boots.

The King gazed at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph.

"Monsieur," said he, after a moment's silence, "not only is Belle-Isle well known to me, but Belle-Isle is mine."

"Very well, Sire, very well; I know all I want to know," replied D'Artagnan; "my discharge!"

"What do you mean? your discharge?"

"Decidedly. I am too proud to eat the King's bread without earning it, or, rather, by earning it badly. My discharge, Sire."

"Oh, indeed!"

"My discharge, or else I shall take it."

"You are angry, monsieur!"

"It would be strange if I was n't, *mordioux!* I am in the saddle thirty-two hours, I gallop night and day, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive here as stiff as a man who had been hanged, and all to find that another has been here before me! to find that I have made an idiot of myself! My discharge, Sire!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Louis XIV., laying his white hand on the musketeer's dusty arm, "what I have just said to you will in no way affect the promise I made you. A promise given ought to be a promise kept."

And the young King, going straight to his table, took a folded paper out of a drawer.

"This is your commission as captain of musketeers, M. d'Artagnan," said he; "you have earned it."

D'Artagnan quickly unfolded the paper and read it twice. He could not believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given to you," continued the King, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle, but also for your gallant exploit at the Place de Grève. There, too, you did me brave service."

"Ah!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, flushing, in spite of his self-control; "your Majesty is aware of that also?"

"Yes."

When the King wished to sound the depths of a conscience, his glance was piercing and his judgment infallible.

"You have something to say and you do not say it," he continued. "Come, now, speak frankly, monsieur. You know I told you, once for all, that you might always be perfectly frank with me."

"Then Sire, what I should like to say is that I would rather be appointed captain of musketeers for charging at the head of my company, or silencing a battery, or taking a city, than for causing two poor wretches to be hanged."

"Now, are you really speaking the truth?"

"And may I ask your Majesty what reason have you for suspecting me of dissimulation?"

"Because, if I know you, it is not your nature to repent of drawing your sword for me."

"Then you are entirely mistaken, Sire. Yes, I do repent of drawing my sword when I see what has been the result of it. The poor men who were put to death were neither your enemies nor mine, Sire, and they did not defend themselves."

The King remained silent for a few seconds.

"And your comrade, does he share in your repentance, M. d'Artagnan?"

"My comrade?"

"Yes. You were not alone, as I have heard."

"Alone? alone where?"

"At the Place de Grève."

"Oh, no, Sire, no!" answered D'Artagnan, reddening at the thought that the King, perhaps, fancied he wished to appropriate to himself the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordioux!* and, as your Majesty has just said, I had a comrade, and a first-rate comrade, too"

"A young man?"

"Yes, sire, a young man — I must really offer your Majesty my compliments; you are as well informed of things out-of-doors as of things within. I presume it is M. Colbert who has brought all those fine stories to the King?"

"M. Colbert has never spoken of you except in the highest terms. If he had done otherwise, he would not have met with a very pleasant reception."

"Ah! that is fortunate!"

"However, he also spoke in very high terms of this young man."

"And it was but justice," answered the musketeer.

"In short, by all accounts this young man is a hero," said Louis XIV., to inflame the feeling of envy by which he supposed D'Artagnan to be actuated.

"Yes, Sire, a hero," repeated D'Artagnan, enchanted, on his side, to have a chance of making Raoul a favorite of the King.

"Do you know his name?"

"Well, I think —"

"Oh, you must, surely, know it?"

"Yes, Sire, and have known it for the last twenty-five years."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the King.

"But I have known him since his birth, Sire; so it's all clear."

"You are willing to affirm it?"

"Sire, the distrustful manner in which your Majesty questions me is altogether foreign to your Majesty's disposition, as I have found it. Has M. Colbert, who has given you such valuable information on other points, forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my intimate friend?"

"He is the Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"Yes, Sire; and the Vicomte de Bragelonne's father is the Comte de la Fère, who contributed so powerfully to the Restoration of Charles II. Oh, Bragelonne belongs to a race of heroes, Sire."

"So he is the son of the nobleman sent to me, or, rather, to M. de Mazarin, by Charles II. to negotiate an alliance?"

"He is, Sire."

"And you tell me that this Comte de la Fère is a very brave man?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for your royal father than there are at present days in the sacred life of your Majesty."

It was now the turn of Louis XIV. to bite his lips.

"Very well, M. d'Artagnan, very well. And M. de la Fère is your friend?"

"And has been for forty years, Sire. So your Majesty sees I am not speaking of things that happened yesterday."

"Should you be pleased to see this young man?"

"Delighted, Sire."

The King touched the bell. An usher appeared.

"Call M. de Bragelonne," said the King.

"Ah! he is here, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day in the Louvre with M. le Prince's company of gentlemen."

The King had hardly finished when Raoul appeared. As soon as he perceived D'Artagnan he smiled at him with that charming smile which is only found on the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, "the King will permit you to embrace me; but tell his Majesty you thank him."

Raoul made such a graceful inclination to the King that Louis, whom superior qualities charmed so long as they did not trench upon his own, was full of admiration for such beauty, vigor, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said he, "I have requested M. le Prince to be so kind as to give you up to me, and have received his answer. You belong to me from to-day. M. le Prince was a good master, but I hope you will not suffer by the change."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, you need not be uneasy; the King has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had a pretty clear idea of the young monarch's character, and thought it safe to tickle his vanity, within certain limits, always being careful of the proprieties, of course, and flattering, even when apparently bantering.

"Sire," said Raoul, in the soft, melodious voice and with the natural, easy elocution he had inherited from his father, "it is not simply from to-day that I belong to your Majesty."

"Oh, I am well aware of that," returned the King. "You are referring to your exploit at the Place de Grève. Indeed, on that day, monsieur, you showed well that you belonged to me."

"But, Sire, I am not speaking of that day, either. It would ill become me to allude to such a paltry service in the presence of such a man as M. d'Artagnan. I was referring to a circumstance that created an epoch in my life and that, when I was sixteen years old, consecrated me to your Majesty's service."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the King. "Pray, what was the circumstance of which you speak, monsieur?"

"It was this: When I was setting out on my campaign with M. le Prince — my first campaign, Sire — the Comte de la Fère accompanied me as far as Saint-Denis, where the remains of Louis XIII., resting on the lowest bench in the crypt of the royal basilica, await a successor, whom God will not send him, I pray, for long years. Then he made me swear upon the ashes of our masters to serve royalty — royalty represented by you and incarnate in you, Sire — in thought, word, and deed. I took that oath, and God and the dead were my witnesses. During ten years, Sire, I have not had as many opportunities of giving effect to it as I desired. But I have always been the soldier of your Majesty and nothing else, and when you summon me to your side, you do not make me change masters, you make me change only garrisons."

Raoul bowed when he had ceased to speak.

Louis XIV. seemed to listen as if he were speaking still.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that was well said! Does not your Majesty think so? A fine old race, Sire, a great race!"

"Yes," murmured the King, who was deeply affected, but who did not venture to reveal his emotion, for it had no other cause than contact with an eminently aristocratic nature, "yes, monsieur, you speak truly; wherever you were, you belonged to the King. But now that you have changed your garrison, you may rest assured you will find that advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul perceived that the King had said all he purposed saying to him, and with the consummate tact characteristic of his refined nature, he bowed and withdrew.

"Have you any other information to give me?" asked the King when he and D'Artagnan were alone.

"Yes, Sire, and I kept it for the end, because it is sad and will put all the courts in Europe in mourning."

"What are you about to tell me?"

"Sire, when I was passing through Blois, a few words sorrowfully echoed from the palace came to my ears."

"In good truth, you alarm me, M. d'Artagnan."

"Sire, these words were uttered by a huntsman who wore crape on his arm."

"For my uncle, Gaston d'Orléans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has breathed his last sigh."

"And I was not told!" cried the King, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the tidings being kept from him.

"Oh, do not feel annoyed, Sire!" said D'Artagnan. "Neither the couriers of Paris nor the couriers of any city in the world can ride as fast as your devoted servant. The courier from Blois will not be here for two hours, and he is a good horseman, I assure you, for I passed him only on the other side of Orléans."

"My uncle Gaston!" murmured the King, resting his head on his hand and summing up in these three words all that his memory recalled of a name that suggested so many opposite feelings.

"Well, well, Sire, such is life," said D'Artagnan, philosophically, echoing the royal thoughts; "the past is past."

"You are right, monsieur, you are right; but, thank God, we have the future, and it shall be our endeavor to see that it is not a gloomy one."

"I place full reliance on your Majesty upon that score," said the musketeer, bowing. "And now—"

"Yes, monsieur, you must excuse me. I was forgetting that you have just ridden a hundred and ten leagues. Go, monsieur. Take good care of one of my best soldiers, and when you have rested, you will come and place yourself at my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I am so always."

And D'Artagnan bowed himself out.

Then, just as if he had made nothing more than a journey from Fontainebleau, he passed rapidly across the Louvre in order to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

A LOVER AND A MISTRESS.

While the tapers were burning in the château of Blois around the lifeless body of Gaston d'Orléans, that last representative of the past; while the townsmen were composing his epitaph, an epitaph which was anything but a panegyric, and while Madame his widow, forgetting that she had once so loved the man who lay there as to abandon her father's palace for his sake, was making her petty calculations of self-interest and her petty sacrifices of pride within twenty steps of the funeral chamber — other interests and other prides were in violent commotion in every corner of the castle where a living soul could enter.

Neither the dismal tolling of the bells, nor the drone of the chanters, nor the glare of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the burial, were able to draw off the attention of two persons stationed at a window looking out on the inside court, a window with which we are already acquainted and which gave light to a room forming one of "the little suites of apartments," as they were styled.

A joyous sunbeam — the sun apparently being very little disturbed by the loss which France had just suffered — had entered this chamber, carrying with it the perfumes of the flowers below and giving a touch of life to the walls themselves.

The two persons who seemed so interested, not in the death of the duke, but in a conversation of which that death was the origin, were a young girl and a young man.

The latter individual was a youth of some twenty-five or twenty-six summers, with a look that was at one time very sprightly, at another very stealthy; he had two immense eyes that he could use with great effect, was small in stature and brown in complexion; his smile revealed a large but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which seemed to enjoy a mobility not usually possessed by this portion of the physiognomy, was occasionally stretched out in very amorous fashion toward his companion, who, we must admit, did not draw back as quickly as strict propriety had the right to require.

As for the young girl, we have made her acquaintance

already, for we saw her some time ago at the same window by the light of the same sun. There was blended in her nature a singular mixture of archness and thoughtfulness. When she laughed she was charming; when she grew serious she was beautiful; but we are bound to say that she was charming oftener than she was beautiful.

These two persons had seemingly reached the culminating point of a quarrel that was partly sportive and partly grave.

"Now, M. Malicorne," said the young girl, "don't you think it is time to talk a little sense?"

"You believe that that is easy, Aure," replied the young man. "To do what you would like to do when you cannot do what you can do —"

"Capital! there he is again, making a regular muddle of it with his phrases."

"I?"

"Yes, you. A truce to your attorney's quibbles, my friend."

"You demand an impossibility. Attorney I am, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"And demoiselle I am, M. Malicorne."

"Alas! I am well aware of it, and the distance between us is so great that you crush me with it; consequently I have nothing more to say to you."

"But I am not crushing you. Say what you have to say; speak, I insist upon it!"

"Oh, of course, I must obey you."

"Upon my word! how very good of you!"

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah! what news you're bringing me! And from where, pray, have you come with such a wonderful discovery?"

"From Orléans, mademoiselle."

"And that is the only news you have brought with you?"

"Oh! by no means! I also bring you the intelligence that the Princess Henrietta of England is coming over to marry his Majesty's brother."

"In good sooth, Malicorne, you are intolerable with your news of the last century. If you are going to practise that abominable habit of yours of gibing at people, you 'll soon find yourself on the other side of the door."

"Oh!"

"Yes, for you are really exasperating."

"There, there, now! Patience, mademoiselle!"

"You think this sort of thing shows you off to advantage, and I know why. Begone!"

"Ask me a question; I will answer you frankly, in the affirmative, if I can do so truly."

"You are well aware of my anxiety to obtain that commission of maid of honor, which I was so silly as to ask you to get for me, and yet you do not use your influence in my behalf."

"I?"

Malicorne half closed his eyes, clasped his hands, and assumed his stealthy expression.

"And what influence can a poor attorney's clerk have, if you please?"

"Your father has n't twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"Only a provincial income, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is n't in the secrets of M. le Prince for nothing."

"All the advantage he derives from that is to lend M. le Prince money."

"In a word, you are not the craftiest rogue in the province for nothing."

"You flatter me."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Why, I prove to you that I have no influence, and you prove to me that I have."

"Yes, yes, but what about my commission?"

"Eh? Your commission?"

"Am I to have it, or am I not to have it?"

"You'll have it."

"But when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"What! in your pocket?"

"Yes."

And smiling his usual sarcastic smile, he drew a paper from his pocket, which Montalais pounced upon as if it were a prey, and read eagerly.

The farther she read the brighter her face grew.

"Malicorne!" she cried, when she had finished, "you are really a good-natured fellow."

"Why do you say so, mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have exacted payment for this commission, and you have not done so."

And she burst out laughing, expecting to put the attorney's clerk out of countenance. Malicorne, however, sustained the attack valiantly.

"I do not understand you," said he.

It was now Montalais' turn to feel put out of countenance.

"I have already declared my feelings in your regard," continued Malicorne. "You told me thrice with a laugh that you did not love me; you kissed me once, and without laughing. I have really had all that I wanted from you."

"All?" said the haughty and coquettish fair one, in a tone that betrayed a sense of wounded pride.

"All, most undoubtedly, mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!"

This monosyllable indicated more of anger than of the gratitude the young man had a right to expect.

But he only shook his head quietly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, careless as to whether this familiarity pleased his mistress or not, "we had better not quarrel over the matter."

"Why so?"

"Because I have known you for a year, and during that period you would have shown me the door a score of times had you not liked me."

"Well, really! And why should I have shown you the door?"

"Because I have been impertinent enough to provoke you to do so."

"Oh! there 's no doubt about that, at least."

"You see, then, I have forced you to confess you like me."

"M. Malicorne!"

"Don't get angry. If you have kept me, you have a reason for it."

"At least I have n't done so because I love you!" cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even go further and say that at this moment you detest me."

"Oh! you never said anything truer."

"Capital! for I, on my side, detest you also."

"Ah! I 'll take care to remember that!"

"Do so. You think me rough and stupid. I, on the other hand, find you with a harsh voice and a face distorted by anger. At the present moment you would rather fling yourself out of the window than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger, while I'd sooner leap from the top of yonder turret than touch the hem of your gown. But in five minutes you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh! there's not a doubt of it!"

"I doubt it very much."

"And I am ready to swear that what I say is true."

"Coxcomb!"

"And I have not given the true reason for all this. The fact is, Aure, you have need of me, and I have need of you. When you are inclined to be merry, I make you laugh; when I feel amorously disposed, I simply gaze at you. I have given you the commission of maid of honor which you wished for; you will soon give me something which I wish for."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you. But at the present moment I assure you, Aure, that I absolutely wish for nothing, so you need not be uneasy."

"You are a hateful man, Malicorne; I was going to be in such good humor at getting this commission, and now you throw a damper on all my pleasure in it."

"Oh, there's no time lost. You will be ever so glad about it when I am gone."

"Then go at once —"

"Agreed. But before I do so, I have an advice to give you."

"About what?"

"Try to recover your excellent temper; you look so ugly when you pout."

"What a coarse fellow you are!"

"Oh, we may as well tell each other some home truths while we are about it."

"O Malicorne! what a bad heart you have!"

"O Montalais! what an ungrateful girl you are!"

The young man rested his elbow upon the sill of the window.

Montalais took a book and opened it.

Malicorne rose, brushed his hat, and smoothed down his black doublet.

Montalais, while pretending to read, watched him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" she cried furiously, at last; "now he has taken on his airs of mock respect. He 's sure to be in the dumps for a full week!"

"For a full fortnight, mademoiselle," answered Malicorne, with a bow.

Montalais raised her little clinched fist over his head.

"Monster!" she cried. "Oh, that I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"Strangle you!"

"Ah! very good indeed! Now I see I am beginning to wish for something."

"And what do you wish for, Master Devil? That I should lose my soul through pure rage?"

Malicorne was rolling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but suddenly he dropped it, seized the young girl by the shoulders, drew her toward him, and applied to her lips two other lips that were very warm, considering how indifferent their owner had pretended to be.

Aure tried to cry out, but the cry was smothered in a kiss. Nervous and angry, the young girl pushed Malicorne back against the wall.

"Nothing could be finer," said Malicorne, philosophically. "That will do me for six weeks. Adieu, mademoiselle, and accept my very humble regards!"

And he took three steps in the direction of the door.

"No, you shall not leave!" cried Montalais, with an angry stamp. "Remain where you are; I order you to do so!"

"You order me?"

"Yes, am I not the mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, beyond a doubt."

"Valuable possessions, *ma foi!* The heart is dry and the soul is stupid!"

"Take care of yourself, Montalais. I know you. You are going to be head over ears in love with your respectful adorer."

"Well, yes!" she answered, hanging on his neck with childish innocence rather than with voluptuous abandonment, "yes, I suppose I must show my gratitude, after all."

"For what?"

"For the commission. Does it not hold all my future?"

"And all mine."

Montalais stared at him.

"It is really frightful," she said. "One never can guess when you are talking seriously."

"I never was more serious in my life. I was going to Paris, you are going there, we are both going there."

"Then that was your only motive for rendering me the service you did me. Oh, you selfish man!"

"But how could I help it, Aure? I cannot live away from you."

"Indeed! Well, I cannot live without you, either. Still, you must confess that you have a very wicked heart!"

"Aure, my dear Aure, be on your guard. If you begin dealing in reproaches, you are aware of the effect they always produce upon me, and I shall set about adoring you immediately."

And while uttering these words Malicorne was drawing the young girl toward him for the second time.

At that very moment a step was heard on the stairs.

The young people were so close together that they would have been surprised in each other's arms had not Montalais violently thrust Malicorne backward. The young man fell on the edge of the door, just as it was abruptly opened.

A loud cry, followed by furious abuse, immediately resounded.

The person who uttered the cry and accompanied it with abusive language was Madame de Saint-Remy; the unlucky Malicorne had nearly crushed her between the wall and half-open door.

"That good-for-nothing again!" cried the old lady. "He's always here!"

"Ah! madame," answered Malicorne, respectfully, "I have not been here for an entire week."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

IN WHICH THE REAL HEROINE OF THIS STORY APPEARS AT LAST.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy came Mademoiselle de la Vallière.

She had heard the outburst of maternal wrath, and since she surmised its cause, she entered the room all of a quiver and perceived the unhappy Malicorne, a look of utter despair on his face which would have excited the pity or the laughter of any one that observed him coolly.

He had promptly intrenched himself behind a big chair, as if with the object of warding off the first assault of the old lady. He had given up all hope of doing so by words, for her voice was louder than his and she spoke without a pause, but he had some reliance on the eloquence of his gestures.

Besides, the irate dame neither listened nor looked; Malicorne had long been one of her pet antipathies. Her rage, however, was too great not to overflow its limits and fall upon his accomplice.

Montalais had her turn.

"And as for you, mademoiselle, do you really think I am not going to inform Madame of what takes place in the apartments of her maids of honor?"

"Oh! mother," exclaimed Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "for pity's sake, spare —"

"Hold your tongue, mademoiselle. Do not take the trouble to intercede for such disreputable persons. That a virtuous girl like you should be exposed to such contamination is bad enough, in all conscience; but that you should condone such ill conduct is what I cannot permit."

"Really," retorted Montalais, stung to rebellion at last, "I do not know what reason you have for treating me in this fashion. I don't see that I am doing any harm."

"And that scamp there has come here for the purpose of doing good, I presume? Eh! I suppose you will tell me that too?"

"He has n't come here for the purpose of doing good or evil, madame. He comes to see me, and that 's all there is about it."

"Oh, very well, very well," answered Madame de Saint-

Remy, "her royal Highness shall know all about it; she will decide."

"At any rate, I do not see why M. Malicorne should not have intentions in my regard, so long as his intentions are honorable."

"Honorable intentions, indeed! And with such a face as that!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

"In the name of my face I thank you, madame," said Malicorne.

"Come, daughter, come," Madame de Saint-Remy went on; "we must inform Madame that at the very moment she is bewailing the death of a spouse, at the very moment we are all bewailing the death of a master in this ancient castle of Blois, this abode of sorrow, there are people in it who rejoice and make merry."

"Oh!" exclaimed the two culprits, making the same gesture.

"A maid of honor! a maid of honor!" cried the old lady, raising her hands to heaven.

"Well, there's where you're mistaken, madame," exclaimed the now thoroughly incensed Montalais. "I am no longer a maid of honor, or, at least, I'm not Madame's."

"So you have given in your resignation, mademoiselle? very well! I can only congratulate you on your decision, and I do so."

"I have not given in my resignation, madame; I am simply entering another person's service, that's all."

"The service of the wife of a lawyer or tradesman?" inquired Madame de Saint-Remy, scornfully.

"You may as well learn that I am not the sort of person who serves tradesmen's or lawyers' wives, and you may as well learn also that I am about to exchange the paltry court in which you vegetate for a court that is almost royal."

"Ah, indeed!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy, with a forced laugh, "a royal court! What do you think of that, my daughter?"

Thereupon she turned round and endeavored to draw Mademoiselle de la Vallière away from Montalais.

But Louise, instead of obeying her, stood looking, now at her mother, now at Aure, out of her beautiful, interceding eyes.

"I did not say a royal court, madame; I said a court that was almost royal," answered Montalais, "for Madame Henrietta of England, who is about to wed his royal Highness Monsieur,

is not a queen. But the words I used are correct, when applied to the court of the King's sister-in-law."

Had a thunderbolt fallen on the Château of Blois it would not have stunned Madame de Saint-Remy as much as these tidings did.

"What is it you are saying about Madame Henrietta?" she stammered.

"I say that I am going to enter her service as maid of honor. Now you know what I am saying."

"As maid of honor!" the mother and daughter cried in unison, the one despairingly, the other joyfully.

"Yes, madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady dropped her head on her breast, as if the blow had been too much for her. But she raised it again, and fired a parting shot at her enemy.

"Oh, yes, indeed! We all have heard of these sorts of promises and of the false hopes that follow them. Just at the very moment when the deluded dupe is flattering herself with their fulfilment, she is surprised to discover that all the fine influence upon which she reckoned has vanished into thin air."

"Oh, madame, my protector's influence is a matter of certainty, and his promises are as good as if they were deeds."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you for the name of this powerful protector?"

"Good heavens! not at all. My protector is the gentleman before you," pointing to Malicorne, who had been most imperturbably cool and most comically dignified during the whole dialogue.

"The gentleman before me?" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Remy, with a burst of laughter, "the gentleman before me is your protector? The man whose influence is so potent, whose promises are as good as deeds, is M. Malicorne?"

Malicorne bowed.

But Montalais' sole response was to take the brevet from her pocket and show it to the old lady.

"Here is the brevet," said she.

This was the finishing stroke. As soon as Madame de Saint-Remy had run her eyes over this blessed parchment, she wrung her hands, an expression of unutterable envy and despair contracted her features, and she had to sit down to keep from fainting.

Montalais was too good-natured to push her victory too far and crush a conquered enemy, especially when that enemy was her friend's mother; she used but did not abuse her triumph.

Malicorne was not so generous. He assumed the noblest attitudes, and sprawled in his armchair with a familiarity that two hours before would have been visited with threats of a caning.

"Maid of honor to the princess!" repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still unconvinced.

"Yes, madame, and through M. Malicorne's protection, as I have said."

"It's incredible!" repeated the old lady. "Is it not incredible, Louise?"

Louise did not answer. Downcast, dreamy, almost grieving, she heaved a sigh, her hand pressed against her fair temples.

"But, monsieur, how did you manage to obtain such a post as this?" inquired Madame de Saint-Remy, suddenly.

"By asking for it, madame."

"Asking whom?"

"One of my friends."

"And your friends are so highly placed at court that they can offer you such a proof of their influence as this?"

"Faith, so it would seem."

"And might I ask the name of these friends?"

"I did not say I had friends, madame; I said a friend."

"And the name of this friend is?"

"*Peste!* madame, you are going too fast. When a man has such a powerful friend as I have, he does not haul him out into the light of day and get robbed of him, perhaps."

"You do right, monsieur, to conceal your friend's name; I fancy you would find it rather hard to tell it."

"At all events," said Montalais, "if the friend has no existence, the brevet has, and that settles the question."

"Then I am to believe," observed Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of a cat that is on the point of scratching, "that when I found this gentleman in your apartments —"

"Well?"

"He was bringing you your brevet?"

"Madame, your surmise is correct."

"Oh, in that case his presence here is quite proper."

"I think so, madame."

"And it would seem I did wrong to upbraid you, mademoiselle?"

"You did very wrong, madame. But I am so accustomed to your reproaches that I forgive you."

"In that case we had better be off. We have nothing further to do here. Are you coming, Louise?"

"Madame!" returned Louise, with a start. "You were saying —"

"And you, apparently, were not listening, my dear child?"

"No, madame, I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Of a thousand things."

"You, at least, do not bear me a grudge, Louise?" cried Montalais, squeezing her hand.

"Why should I, my dear Aure?" answered the young girl, in a voice as sweet as music.

"Upon my word, even if the poor child did feel a little ill-will toward you," retorted Madame de Saint-Remy, "there would be nothing very wonderful in it."

"And why, in God's name, should she bear me ill-will?"

"It seems to me that she is of quite as good a family as you are, and quite as pretty also."

"Mother!" exclaimed Louise.

"A hundred times prettier, madame, though not of a better family. But all this does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will."

"Do you think, then, that it will be very pleasant for her to be buried alive here in Blois while you are shining at Paris?"

"But, madame, I am not the person who prevents Louise from following me to Paris. On the contrary, her presence there would make me very happy."

"But it would seem that M. Malicorne is all-powerful at court —"

"Ah, so much the worse, madame," returned Malicorne, "every one for himself in this miserable world."

"Malicorne!" cried Montalais.

Then stooping down and whispering to the young man:

"Keep Madame de Saint-Remy occupied, either by arguing or making up with her. I want to talk with Louise."

And a gentle pressure of the hand rewarded him for his future obedience.

Malicorne, grumbling and reluctant, drew near Madame de Saint-Remy, and Montalais, throwing her arms about her friend's neck, said:

"What is the matter with you? Is it true you will love me no longer because I am going to 'shine,' as your mother says?"

"Oh! no," answered the young girl, with difficulty keeping back the tears; "on the contrary, I am happy in your happiness."

"Happy! why, you look as if you were going to weep!"

"And does one never weep except from envy?"

"Ah! I understand. I am going to Paris, and that word 'Paris' recalled the memory of a certain cavalier."

"Aure!"

"Of a certain cavalier who once dwelt in Blois and now dwells in Paris."

"I really do not know what ails me. I feel as if I were choking."

"Well, weep, since you cannot smile on me."

Louise raised her sweet face; the tears that coursed down her cheeks one after the other, shone like diamonds.

"Come, now, confess," added Montalais.

"Confess what?"

"The cause of these tears; no one weeps without cause; I am your friend; all that you wish me to do, I will do; Malicorne is more powerful than people think, take my word for it! Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise heaved a sigh.

"You don't answer."

"What am I to answer?"

"Yes or no; not a very difficult thing to do, I fancy."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"Well and good. That means you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"You obstinate little creature!" exclaimed Montalais. "Who ever heard of a friend keeping a secret from a friend! Come, confess you want to go to Paris; confess that you are dying to see Raoul!"

"I cannot confess to such a thing as that."

"And you are wrong."

"Why?"

"Because — do you see this brevet?"

"Of course I see it."

"Well, I can get another like it for you."

"Through whom?"

"Malicorne."

"Aure, are you telling me the truth? Is such a thing possible?"

"Undoubtedly. Malicorne is here, and what he has done for me he must do for you."

Malicorne had heard his name mentioned twice. He was delighted at having a chance of breaking off from Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round.

"What is the matter, mademoiselle?"

"Come here, Malicorne," said Montalais, with an imperious gesture.

Malicorne obeyed.

"A brevet like this one," ordered Montalais.

"What do you mean?"

"A brevet like this one. Is not that plain enough?"

"But —"

"I must have it."

"Oho! you must have it?"

"Yes."

"It is impossible, M. Malicorne, is it not?" said Louise.

"Upon my word, mademoiselle, if it is for you —"

"Yes, M. Malicorne, it would be for me."

"And if Mademoiselle de Montalais requested it as well as you —"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais does not request, she commands."

"Oh, in that case we must endeavor to obey you, mademoiselle."

"And you will see to it that she is appointed?"

"I shall try."

"None of your evasive answers. Louise de la Vallière will be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta inside of a week."

"You are going pretty quick, are n't you?"

"Inside of a week, or —"

"Or?"

"You 'll take back your brevet, M. Malicorne; I shall not abandon my friend."

"Dear Montalais!" murmured Louise.

"Very well, keep your brevet," said Malicorne, "Mademoiselle de la Vallière will be maid of honor."

"Can it be true?" cried Louise.

"It is quite certain."

"And I may hope to go to Paris?"

"You may be sure of it."

"Oh! M. Malicorne, how happy you have made me, and how grateful I am!" cried the young girl, clasping her hands and bounding with joy.

"What a little dissembler you are!" said Montalais. "Now try to make us believe you are not in love with Raoul!"

Louise blushed like a rose in June. But instead of answering she went and kissed her mother.

"M. Malicorne must be a prince in disguise," replied the old lady, "he can do everything."

"Would you like to be a maid of honor, madame?" he asked Madame de Saint-Remy. "While I am about it I might as well get everybody appointed."

And he passed out, leaving the poor lady "unshod," as Tallemant des Réaux would say.

"Well," muttered Malicorne on his way downstairs, "this is going to cost me another bill of a thousand livres; but it can't be helped; my friend Manicamp does n't do something for nothing."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

MALICORNE AND MANICAMP.

The introduction of these two fresh characters into this history of ours, and the mysterious affinity of their names and sentiments, deserve some attention from both the author and the reader.

We are going, therefore, to give a few particulars anent the lives of M. Malicorne and M. de Manicamp.

Malicorne, as we know already, had travelled to Orléans in search of the brevet for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had created such a lively sensation in a certain quarter of the château at Blois.

He did so because M. de Manicamp happened to be then residing in Orléans. A singular personage, if ever there were one, was this M. de Manicamp; a youth of a good deal of cleverness, but always short of cash, always hard up, although he dipped at will into the purse of the Comte de Guiche, one of the best supplied purses of the period.

The reason of this was that M. de Manicamp — the son of a poverty-stricken squire, a vassal of the Grammonts — had been the count's playmate in boyhood. Another reason was that M. de Manicamp was ingenious enough to succeed in creating an income for himself in the opulent family of the marshal.

From his childhood he had, with a spirit of calculation very unusual at his time of life, lent his name and his assistance to the follies of the young nobleman. Did his comrade steal fruit intended for Madame la Maréchale's special delectation, or break a mirror, or knock the eye out of a dog, De Manicamp at once declared himself the culprit and received the due punishment, not rendered the milder because the victim of it happened to be innocent.

But his self-denial was well paid for. Instead of wearing the shabby clothes to which his paternal fortune entitled him, he was enabled to dress as showily and as fashionably as a young lord with an income of fifty thousand livres.

Yet he was neither mean in character nor humble in spirit. No, he was simply a philosopher, or, rather, he was imbued with the indifference, apathy, imagination of the man who has lost the feelings of his caste. His only ambition now was to spend money. But in this respect our worthy M. de Manicamp was a bottomless gulf.

Regularly every three or four years he drained the Comte de Guiche, and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained and had turned his pockets and his purse inside out before him, declaring that at least a fortnight must elapse before the paternal generosity was likely to fill the said pockets and purse, De Manicamp lost all his energy, went to bed, stayed there, refused to eat, and sold his splendid suits, giving as his reason that, being confined to his bed, he had no further use for them.

During this bodily and mental prostration, the Comte de Guiche's purse was gradually replenished, and once replenished, it soon found an outlet and overflowed into that of Manicamp,

who purchased new clothes, dressed in his former fashion, and resumed the life he had led before.

His mania for selling his clothes at a quarter of the price they had cost had rendered our hero celebrated in Orléans, but we should feel rather embarrassed if we were asked why he selected this particular city as his place of penitence.

The rakes of the province, the dandies living on an income of six hundred livres a year, shared among them the relics of his opulence.

Among the admirers of Manicamp and his splendid habiliments, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous. He was the son of a syndic of the city, who had often lent money to M. de Condé, the latter, like all the Condé's, being out of cash.

Now M. Malicorne was the guardian of the paternal money-box. That is to say, in an age when morals were very free and easy, he gained, by following his father's example and lending money at high interest for short terms, an income of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning the six hundred livres allowed him by the syndic's generosity. So that Malicorne, having two thousand four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste upon follies of all sorts, was the prince of good fellows in Orléans.

But, altogether unlike Manicamp, Malicorne was inordinately ambitious. Ambition was the mainspring of his love, ambition prompted his prodigality, and he would have been ready to plunge into ruin for the sake of his ambition.

Malicorne was determined to succeed at any cost; and so, not counting the cost, he had taken a mistress and a friend.

The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel to him, and refused him the least favors of love; but she was a girl of noble birth, and that was all Malicorne wanted.

The friend did not return his friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, who was himself the favorite of Monsieur the King's brother, and this was all Malicorne wanted.

However, when he tolled up the cost of these advantages, this was what he found:

Mademoiselle de Montalais cost him, in ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres a year.

Manicamp cost him, in loans that were never repaid, from twelve to fifteen hundred livres a year.

Clearly, therefore, there was nothing left for Malicorne himself.

Ah! yes; we had forgotten — there was left the paternal money-box.

His method in dealing with it was one upon which he observed the most profound secrecy. It consisted in anticipating the income given him by his father by half-a-dozen years, and taking the amount due him for that period — some fifteen thousand livres — from the syndic's coffers, with the solemn purpose, be it understood, of making good the deficit whenever it was in his power to do so.

It would be in his power to do so after he had obtained some lucrative office in the household of Monsieur, and this household was sure to be formed on Monsieur's marriage.

The time had now come when the household must be established. An office in the household of a prince of the blood, obtained through the influence and on the recommendation of such a friend as the Comte de Guiche, would be worth at least twelve thousand livres a year, and, in view of Malicorne's ability in increasing his income, the twelve thousand livres could easily be raised to twenty.

Then once inducted into this office, Malicorne would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, belonging to a family in which the distaff confers nobility, would not only have a dowry, but would confer nobility on Malicorne.

But since Mademoiselle de Montalais, although an only daughter, would not inherit a very large fortune from her father, it was necessary that she should be connected with some great princess as freehanded as the widow of the late duke was niggardly.

Moreover, in order that the husband should not go one way and the wife go another, — a situation pregnant with serious inconveniences, especially considering the character of himself and his future spouse, — Malicorne had come to the conclusion that the central point of union between them must be the house of Monsieur the King's brother.

Mademoiselle de Montalais must be one of Madame's maids of honor; Malicorne must be one of Monsieur's officers.

It is easily seen that only a good head could have originated such a scheme; it is also easily seen that it had been skilfully put in operation thus far.

Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask M. de Guiche for a brevet of maid of honor.

The Comte de Guiche had asked this brevet of Monsieur, who had signed it unhesitatingly.

But Malicorne's main object — such an active mind did not limit its views to the present, but stretched out toward the future — was this: to have a young, pretty, clever, intriguing woman close to Madame Henrietta, and so learn all the feminine secrets of the young household, while he, Malicorne, through the agency of his friend Manicamp, would learn all the masculine secrets of the same household. By these means he was sure to attain to a position that would be at once speedy and splendid.

Now Malicorne was an ugly name. He was too clever to hide from himself this melancholy fact. But you may purchase an estate and be Malicorne *de* — something or other, which would have quite a noble sound to the ear. And, after this was accomplished, it was quite possible to discover a noble origin even for the name of Malicorne. Really, now, might it not be derived from an estate where a bull with two deadly horns had caused some great calamity and baptized the soil with the blood he had spilled?

Certes, this plan bristled with difficulties; but the greatest of all the difficulties was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself.

Capricious, fickle, sly, giddy, light, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, an Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single flip of her white fingers or a single puff of her laughing lips, the edifice it had taken Malicorne a month to construct.

Love apart, Malicorne was happy. But this love, which he could not help feeling, he was stoical enough to be able to hide carefully, knowing well that if he ever loosened the bonds that held this female Proteus she would, like the demon she was, fling him to the ground and laugh at him besides.

On the other hand, though Montalais thought she did not love Malicorne, she really loved him. He had so often told her he did not care for her that at last she believed him, — at least, occasionally, — and when she did, she fancied she detested him. Then, when she tried to regain her hold on him by coquetry, Malicorne became a greater coquette than herself.

But what made the tie between them so indissoluble was the fact that Malicorne was always fairly brimming over with news from the court and from the city, was always bring-

ing with him a new fashion, a secret or a perfume, and that he never asked for a rendezvous, but on the contrary made her supplicate him for the favors he was burning to obtain.

On the other hand, Montalais was not chary of her revelations. She made Malicorne acquainted with all that happened in the château. With some of those stories he made Manicamp roar with laughter. Manicamp afterward related them, drowsily, to M. de Guiche, and M. de Guiche related them to Monsieur.

Such, in a few words, was the network of petty interests and petty conspiracies that united Blois to Orléans and Orléans to Paris, and which was to end in the latter city, where poor little La Vallière was to effect so great a revolution, a revolution she was far from expecting as she returned gayly to her apartments, leaning on her mother's arm, unconscious of the strange fate in store for her.

As for Goodman Malicorne, — we are speaking of the syndic of Orléans, — he had no clearer view of the present than others have of the future, and had little suspicion, as he took his daily walk on the Place Sainte-Catherine, from three to five in the afternoon, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII., and his cloth shoes with their big knots of ribbon, that it was he who paid for all these roars of laughter, all these stealthy kisses, all these whisperings, all these ribbons, and all these bubble projects which made a chain of forty-five leagues between the Palais de Blois and the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER LXXX.

MANICAMP AND MALICORNE.

Malicorne started, then, in search of his friend Manicamp, as we have related already, and found him in his temporary retreat at Blois.

It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was about to sell the last decent suit in his possession. Only a fortnight previously he had forced M. de Guiche to give him a hundred pistoles, money that was absolutely needed

by the count to enable him to make a proper appearance on the occasion of Madame's arrival at Havre. He had got, three days before, fifty pistoles out of Malicorne, as the price of Montalais' brevet.

Having, therefore, exhausted all his resources, he had nothing further to look forward to except the proceeds of the sale of a certain fine garment, made of cloth and satin, and embroidered in gold, which had aroused the admiration of the court.

But as this was the only suit left him, he was, as we have been obliged to confess to the reader, compelled to take to his bed before entering into negotiations for its sale. Thus, being without pocket money, he had to surrender his usual comforts, and devote to sleep the time that had been spent in banquets, gaming, and balls.

It has been said, "He who sleeps dines;" but it has nowhere been said, "He who sleeps plays," or "He who sleeps dances."

Manicamp, forced by sad necessity to give up all thoughts of playing or dancing for at least a full week, was naturally very sad. He was waiting for the appearance of a usurer when Malicorne entered. A cry of vexation escaped him.

"What!" he exclaimed in a tone which cannot be described, "so it 's you again, my good friend?"

"Humph! you 're wonderfully polite!" said Malicorne.

"Ah! but you see I was expecting money, and instead of money, it 's you that I see."

"And what if I brought you money, eh?"

"Oh, that 's a different thing. Welcome, my dear friend."

And he stretched out his hand, not for Malicorne's hand, but for Malicorne's purse.

Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

"But the money?" inquired Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you want to get it, you must earn it."

"What must I do for it?"

"Earn it, *parbleu!*"

"Earn it how?"

"Oh, it 's no easy job, I can tell you."

"*Diable!*"

"You must get up and go to M. de Guiche at once."

"I get up?" returned Manicamp, stretching himself voluptuously under the sheets. "Oh, no! not if I know it!"

"So you have sold your clothes, as usual?"

"No, I have still a coat, my finest one, too. I 'm expecting a purchaser."

"But have you a pair of breeches ? "

"If you look you 'll see them on the chair there."

"Well then, since you have your breeches and your doublet, get into them immediately, have a horse saddled, and set out."

"I have n't the slightest notion of it."

"Why ? "

"*Morbleu !* are you not aware that M. de Guiche is at Étampes ? "

"No, I thought he was at Paris. So much the better ; you 'll have a ride of fifteen leagues before you instead of one of thirty."

"You are a nice fellow, you are ! If I ride fifteen leagues in my doublet, it won't be fit to wear, and I can sell it for only fifteen pistoles in place of thirty."

"Oh, sell it for what you like, but I must have another commission for a maid of honor."

"For whom ? Has the Montalais woman grown double ? "

"You rascal ! It 's you that are double. No wonder, after swallowing two fortunes, mine and the Comte de Guiche's."

"Don't you think it might be more becoming in you to say, 'The Comte de Guiche's and mine' ? "

"Oh, all right, honor where honor is due ; but to come back to my brevet."

"My dear friend, it is impossible."

"Prove that to me."

"Madame will have only a dozen maids of honor. I have already obtained a favor for you that was eagerly sought for by twelve hundred women. To do so, I had to employ as much diplomacy — "

"Yes, yes, I am aware of all your heroic efforts, my dear friend."

"Oh, I know how to manage things," said Manicamp.

"You need n't tell me that ! So, when I am king, I promise one thing."

"What is it ? To call yourself Malicorne I. ? "

"No, to make you superintendent of my finances. But that is not the question at present."

"Unfortunately."

"The question at present is to get me a second appointment for a maid of honor."

"My friend, if you were to promise me heaven, I would not put myself out for it at the present moment."

Malicorne made the money in his pocket jingle.

"There are twenty pistoles in it," said he.

"And, good heavens! what good could twenty pistoles do me?" answered Manicamp.

"Eh!" exclaimed Malicorne, taken aback, "could you not add them to the five hundred you owe me already?"

"You are right," returned Manicamp, stretching out his hand a second time. "Looking at the matter from that standpoint, I believe I can accept them. Hand them over."

"What the devil, man! don't be in such a hurry! If I give you the twenty pistoles, am I to have the brevet?"

"Undoubtedly."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Are you not going a little too fast, M. de Manicamp? You promise more than I ask you. Thirty leagues in a single day would be too much, and I should n't like to kill you."

"When I want to oblige a friend, nothing is impossible for me."

"Why, you really are a hero!"

"Where are the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," returned Malicorne, showing them.

"Good."

"But, my dear M. de Manicamp, they will hardly be enough to furnish you with post horses."

"Oh, they will, don't be alarmed."

"Excuse me, though. Fifteen leagues from here to Étampes —"

"Fourteen."

"Well, be it so. Fourteen leagues make seven posts; twenty sous a post, seven livres; seven livres for the courier, fourteen; the same for returning, twenty-eight; the same amount for bed and supper; so that your kindness will cost you altogether somewhere in the neighborhood of sixty livres."

Manicamp uncoiled himself in the bed like a serpent, and, fixing his big eyes on Malicorne, said:

"You are right; I cannot be back before to-morrow."

And he took the twenty pistoles.

"Then start at once."

"As I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have plenty of time."

"Time for what?"

"For having a game."

"And with what do you wish to play?"

"Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*"

"No, you always win from me."

"Well, I'll wager them."

"Against what?"

"Against twenty pistoles more."

"And what is the wager to be?"

"We have agreed that it is fourteen leagues to Étampes?"

"Yes."

"And fourteen leagues back?"

"Yes."

"In all, twenty-eight leagues?"

"Of course."

"You allow me fourteen hours for those twenty-eight leagues?"

"I do so."

"And an hour to find the Comte de Guiche?"

"Willingly."

"And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

"Sum total, sixteen hours."

"You count as well as M. Colbert."

"Twelve o'clock, is n't it?"

"Half-past."

"Stay, you have an excellent watch, I think."

"What were you saying?" asked Malicorne, hastily restoring his watch to his fob.

"Ah, true. I was about to offer to bet you the twenty pistoles you lent me that you should have the Comte de Guiche's letter in —"

"In how many hours?"

"Eight."

"Has your horse wings?"

"That 's my affair. Are you still willing to wager?"

"That I am to have the count's letter in eight hours, you say?"

"Yes."

"Signed?"

"Yes."

"In my own hands?"

"In your own hands."

"Agreed! I take the bet," said Malicorne, curious to know how this vendor of clothes was going to get out of the difficulty.

"The thing 's settled, then?"

"It 's settled."

"Hand me pen, ink, and paper."

"Here they are."

"Ah!"

Manicamp rose with a sigh, and leaning on his left elbow, wrote, in his best handwriting, the following lines:

"*Order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. de Guiche will undertake to obtain at sight.*

"*De Manicamp.*"

This painful task accomplished, Manicamp lay back in bed at his full length.

"But," inquired Malicorne, "what is the meaning of all this?"

"It means that if you are in a hurry to get the Comte de Guiche's letter for Monsieur, I have won my bet."

"How can that be?"

"It 's self-evident, so far as I can see. You take that paper."

"Yes."

"You set out in my place."

"Ah!"

"You ride like the wind."

"Good!"

"In six hours you are at Étampes; in seven you have the count's letter, and I have won my wager without ever budging from my bed, and that will suit you quite as much as it does me, I have no doubt."

"Upon my soul, Manicamp, you are a great man!"

"I am quite aware of that."

"So I start for Étampes?"

"At once."

"Find the Comte de Guiche with this letter?"

"He will give you a similar one for Monsieur."

"And then set out for Paris?"

"Yes, to call on Monsieur and present him the letter."

"And Monsieur consents?"

"Directly."

"And I have my brevet?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"Ah!"

"I have treated you nicely, have n't I?"

"Adorably!"

"Thanks!"

"Then you can do whatever you like with the Comte de Guiche, my dear Manicamp?"

"Except turn him into money."

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying. But say, if instead of asking him for money, you asked him for something else?"

"For what?"

"Oh, for something very important."

"What do you call important?"

"Suppose one of your friends wanted you to do him a service?"

"I should n't do it."

"Selfish man!"

"Or, at least, I should ask him what service he intended doing me in return."

"Oh, that is natural. Well, then; this friend is now speaking to you."

"You, Malicorne?"

"Yes, I."

"Indeed! Why, you must be very rich?"

"I have still fifty pistoles."

"Just the sum I need. Where are your fifty pistoles?"

"Here," answered Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Well, my dear fellow, tell me what you want."

Malicorne again took up pen, ink, and paper, and presented them to Manicamp.

"Write," said he.

"Dictate."

"*An order for an office in Monsieur's household* —"

"Oh!" exclaimed Manicamp, raising the pen from the paper, "an office in Monsieur's household for fifty pistoles?"

"You must not have heard me correctly, my friend."

"Then what did you say?"

"I said five hundred pistoles."

"And where are they?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the rouleaux with his eyes; but this time Malicorne kept away from him.

"Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles!"

"Oh, it's nothing, my dear fellow; but I am always happy to place my credit at your disposal; dictate."

Malicorne continued:

"*Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain from Monsieur for my friend Malicorne.*"

"I am through with it," said Manicamp.

"Excuse me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah, yes, you're right. And now the five hundred pistoles."

"Here are two hundred and fifty."

"But the other two hundred and fifty?"

"You 'll have them when I have my office."

Manicamp made a grimace.

"In that case hand me back my letter of recommendation."

"And why?"

"I want to add a couple of words."

"A couple of words?"

"Yes, just two words."

"What are they?"

"'In haste!'"

Malicorne returned the letter, and Manicamp added the words.

"Nothing could be better," said Malicorne, resuming possession of the paper.

Manicamp proceeded to count the pistoles.

"There are twenty wanting," said he.

"How can that be?"

"The twenty I have won."

"Won how?"

"When I bet that you were to have the Comte de Guiche's letter in eight hours."

"You are right."

He handed over the twenty pistoles.

Whereupon Manicamp took up handfuls of the pieces and poured them down in glittering cascades on the bed.

"This second post will apparently cost me a good deal more than the first," muttered Malicorne, as he dried the paper; "but —"

He paused, took up the pen, and wrote to Montalais:

"*Mademoiselle, inform your friend that her commission will soon reach her; I am about to set out to get it signed, when I shall have ridden eighty-six leagues altogether for love of you.*"

Then resuming his interrupted sentence, he said, with his cynical smile:

"A post that will cost me a good deal more than the first; but, if the profit accruing from it is not more than the expenditure, and if Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not do me more service than ever Mademoiselle de Montalais has done me — well, my name is not Malicorne. Good-bye, Manicamp."

And he passed out.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE COURT-YARD OF THE HÔTEL GRAMMONT.

On Malicorne's arrival at Étampes he learned that the Comte de Guiche had started for Paris.

Malicorne took two hours' repose and prepared to follow him.

He arrived in the city during the night, put up at a little hotel where he had been in the habit of stopping during his previous visits to the capital, and at eight the next morning made his appearance at the Hôtel Grammont. He was just in time. The Comte de Guiche was on the point of going to take leave of Monsieur on his departure for Havre, where the élite of the French nobility were to welcome Madame on her arrival from England.

Malicorne gave the name of Manicamp, and was ushered in immediately.

The Comte de Guiche was in the court-yard of the Hôtel Grammont inspecting his horses, which his grooms and equerries were passing in review before him. He was standing in front of his tradesmen and lackeys, praising or finding fault

with the horses, harness, and equipments generally that were brought before him, when in the midst of this important occupation he heard Manicamp's name announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed. "Show him in, *parbleu!* show him in."

And he advanced toward the gate.

The gate was half open and Malicorne slipped through it, to the surprise of the Comte de Guiche, who saw a face entirely unknown to him in place of the one he expected.

"Pardon me, M. le Comte," said the intruder, "but I think a mistake has been made. M. de Manicamp has been announced, and I am only his messenger."

"Ah, indeed!" returned the count, somewhat coldly, "you have a message for me?"

"A letter, M. le Comte."

Malicorne presented the letter, scrutinizing the count's face as he did so.

When the latter read it, he burst out laughing.

"What! another maid of honor?" he cried. "Why, the rascal is apparently taking all the maids of honor in France under his protection!"

Malicorne bowed.

"And why does he not come himself?"

"He is in bed."

"Ah! *diable!* he has no money, then?"

And De Guiche shrugged his shoulders.

"But what does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a gesture which implied that upon that subject he was as much in the dark as the count.

"Why does n't he make use of his credit?" continued De Guiche.

"Ah, with regard to that I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"It is that the only one with whom Manicamp has credit is yourself, M. le Comte."

"Why, he will not be able to go to Havre, then?"

Another gesture on the part of Malicorne.

"But he must go! Everybody will be there."

"I hope, M. le Comte, that he will not miss so fine an occasion."

"He ought to be already in Paris."

"Oh, he will take a short cut, and so make up for lost time."

"And where is he?"

"At Orléans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, with a bow, "you are evidently a man of good taste."

Malicorne had on the suit of Manicamp.

He answered, bowing in return:

"You do me great honor, monsieur."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was shrewd; he understood the situation. Besides, the *de* put before his name raised him, for the time, to the level of the man who questioned him.

He examined the holsters with the air of a connoisseur, and said, without any embarrassment:

"They are somewhat heavy, monsieur."

"You see," observed De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who is a man of taste, declares your holsters heavy; just what I said myself a while ago."

The saddler tried to excuse himself.

"And what is your opinion of this horse, a purchase I made lately?" inquired De Guiche.

"To look at him, he seems perfect, M. le Comte; but my opinion would have no value unless I put him through his paces."

"Well, mount him, M. de Malicorne, and take a few turns round the riding-school."

The court of the hôtel was, in fact, so arranged that it could be converted into a riding-school at a moment's notice, whenever it was necessary.

Malicorne, with entire self-possession, arranged the bridle and snaffle-reins, laid his left hand on the mane, placed his foot in the stirrup, and vaulted into the saddle. First he walked the horse around the court. The second time he made him trot. The third he put him to a gallop. Then he halted in presence of the count, alighted, and flung the reins to a groom.

"Well," said the count, "what do you think of him now, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, M. le Comte, is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking to see whether the bit were easy to his mouth, I per-

ceived that he was rising seven. It is the proper age for beginning the training of a war horse. The forehand is light, and we are told that a horse which holds its head high never tires the rider's hand. The withers are somewhat low. The sinking of the hindquarters would almost lead me to believe that he was not of pure German race, that there was a strain of English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high and may cut himself; a good deal of care should be given to the shoeing. But he is easily managed, and as I turned him round and round, I found him ready to respond to the slightest touch."

"Your judgment has proved admirable, M. de Malicorne," replied the count. "You are a connoisseur, beyond a doubt."

Then inspecting him more closely:

"That is a remarkably elegant dress you are wearing, M. de Malicorne," said he. "I presume it was not made in the province. They do not cut clothes in that fashion at Tours or Orléans."

"No, monsieur; this was made in Paris."

"Yes, that is plainly to be seen. But to return to the matter in hand. So Manicamp wants to have a second maid of honor?"

"You have read what he wrote, M. le Comte."

"What is the name of the first one?"

Malicorne felt that his face was flushing.

"She is, in truth, a very charming maid of honor," he answered hurriedly, "and her name is Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Aha! You know her, then?"

"Yes, she is my *fiancée*, or very nearly so."

"Oh, that is another thing. Allow me to congratulate you," said the count, upon whose lips a courtier-like jest had been flickering. But the title of *fiancée* given to Montalais by Malicorne at once reminded him of the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second brevet intended?" he continued. "Is it for Manicamp's fiancée? In that case I pity her. Poor girl, she 'll have but a sorry husband."

"No, M. le Comte. The second brevet is for Mademoiselle la Baume le blanc de la Vallière."

"A stranger to me," observed De Guiche.

"Yes, a stranger to you, monsieur," said Malicorne, with an answering smile.

"Very well. I'll speak about her to Monsieur. By the way, is she a lady?"

"Yes, and belonging to a very good family. At present she is maid of honor to the Dowager Duchesse d'Orléans."

"Good! Will you be my companion on my visit to Monsieur?"

"Gladly, if you confer such an honor on me."

"Have you your carriage with you?"

"No, I came on horseback."

"And in such a costume as that?"

"No, monsieur; I posted from Orléans and changed my travelling suit for the one I am wearing, in order to appear before you."

"Oh, yes. I remember. You told me you came from Orléans."

And, after crumpling up Manicamp's letter, he stuffed it in his pocket.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne, timidly, "I think you have not read the whole of it."

"Not read the whole of it? What do you mean?"

"There were two notes in the same envelope."

"Indeed! are you sure?"

"Oh! quite sure."

"Well, let me look."

And he opened the envelope anew.

"Ah, *ma foi!* you're right enough."

And he unfolded the letter he had not yet read.

"I suspected as much!" he exclaimed. "A demand now for an office in Monsieur's household! Why, this Manicamp is a gulf! The scamp must make a business of this sort of thing!"

"No, M. le Comte, he wishes to make a gift of it."

"To whom?"

"To me, monsieur."

"And why did you not tell me so at once, my dear M. Mauvaisecorne?"

"Malicorne!"

"Ah, excuse me. It is the Latin that bothers me, that frightful custom of seeing etymologies everywhere. Why the mischief are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala:* mau-

vaise, you see, don't you? They are the same. You will forgive me, M. de Malicorne, will you not?"

"I am really deeply impressed by your kindness, monsieur. The more reason why I should say something to you on the spot."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"I am not a gentleman; I am an honest man, and I think I am not without ability, but my name is Malicorne without any prefix."

"Indeed!" cried De Guiche, scrutinizing the sharp features of his companion. "Well, in any case, monsieur, you strike me as being a very amiable person. I like your face, M. Malicorne. You must have some preternaturally fine qualities to have pleased such an egotist as Manicamp. Be frank, now. Are you not some saint or other that has winged his way down to our earth?"

"Why do you say so?"

"*Morbleu!* Else he would never have done anything for you! Did you not tell me that he wished to obtain an appointment for you in the King's household?"

"Excuse me, in Monsieur's. Besides, if I obtain this office, it is not at his hands I shall obtain it, but at yours."

"And then perhaps it is not entirely for nothing that he is interested in your favor?"

"M. le Comte —"

"Hold on a moment — there is a Malicorne at Orléans — I am right, *parbleu!* And he lends money to M. le Prince."

"I think he is my father, monsieur."

"Ah, I have it! So M. le Prince has got hold of the father and that voracious glutton of a Manicamp has got hold of the son. Be on your guard, monsieur. I know him. He'll pick your very bones, *mordieu!*"

"But the difference between me and my father, monsieur, is that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, with a smile.

"I knew well you were a saint or the next best thing to it, M. Malicorne. You shall have your appointment, or my name 's not De Guiche."

"Oh! how can I ever show my gratitude, monsieur!" exclaimed Malicorne in a transport.

"Come, M. Malicorne, let us go to the prince, let us go to the prince."

And De Guiche went to the gate, making a sign to Malicorne to follow him.

But just as they were about to pass through it, a young man appeared on the other side of the threshold. He was about twenty-four or twenty-five years old, with a pale face, thin lips, sparkling eyes, brown hair and eyebrows.

"Is that you? Good-day," said he, almost pushing De Guiche back into the court-yard.

"Ah! you here, De Wardes? Booted, spurred, and with whip in hand, too!"

"The costume, naturally, of a man starting for Havre. There will be nobody in Paris to-morrow."

And the newcomer bowed to Malicorne, who in his rich habiliments looked like a prince.

"M. Malicorne," said De Guiche to his friend, who bowed a second time.

Malicorne inclined in his turn.

"I say, De Wardes," said the count, "you are up to this sort of things. Will you tell us what offices are to be filled at court, or, rather, in Monsieur's household?"

"In Monsieur's household?" said De Wardes, throwing his head back with an air of meditation. "Let me see — I think the post of grand equerry is vacant."

"Oh!" exclaimed Malicorne, "there's no use talking of such a position as that, monsieur. My ambition does not reach within miles of it."

De Wardes was more penetrating and suspicious than De Guiche. He saw through Malicorne at a glance.

"The fact is," said he, looking him all over, "the holder of such a post as that must be a duke or a peer."

"I ask for only a very humble appointment, monsieur," returned Malicorne; "I am a very humble person myself, and do not rate myself above my position."

"M. Malicorne is, as you can see for yourself, De Wardes," said the count, "a first-rate fellow. His only defect is that he was not born a gentleman."

"Granted," answered De Wardes. "But permit me to observe, my dear count, that a person who has not some sort of rank cannot reasonably expect to become a member of Monsieur's household."

"True," said the count. "The etiquette in that respect is very strict. *Diable!* we never thought of it."

"Alas! a great misfortune for me, a terrible misfortune, M. le Comte," exclaimed Malicorne, turning slightly pale.

"But not without remedy, I hope," answered De Guiche.

"*Pardieu!*" cried De Wardes, "the remedy can easily be found. Get yourself made a gentleman, my dear monsieur. His Eminence Cardinal Mazarin did nothing but make gentlemen from morning till night."

"Hush, De Wardes, hush! It 's ill jesting on such a subject. It does not become persons in our position to treat such a question lightly. It is true letters of nobility may be purchased; but it is too great a misfortune that such should be the case for us nobles to cut jokes about it."

"*Ma foi!* what a Puritan you are, as the English would say."

"M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne," announced a lackey in the court, in the same tones which he would have announced the name in a drawing-room.

"Ah, my dear Raoul, come over here, come here quickly. What! booted and spurred also? So you are about to start?"

Bragelonne approached and saluted the young men with the gentle and serious air peculiar to him. His salutation was specially directed to De Wardes, with whom he was not acquainted, and whose features became strangely cold and hostile on Raoul's appearance.

"My friend," said he to De Guiche, "I have come to ask the favor of your company to Havre. We are all going there, I presume?"

"Oh, nothing could be better! It 's quite delightful. What a pleasant journey we 'll have together! M. Malicorne, M. de Bragelonne, M. de Wardes, allow me to introduce you."

The two young men exchanged a formal greeting. Their natures seemed, even at this their very first meeting, to be mutually antagonistic. De Wardes was artful, crafty, and full of dissimulation; Raoul grave, high-minded, and upright.

"Will you settle a dispute between De Wardes and me, Raoul?"

"What is it about?"

"About nobility."

"And who can decide upon a question of nobility if a Grammont cannot?"

"I don't ask you for compliments, I ask you for your opinion."

"I do not see how I can give it unless I know the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes insists that the way titles are distributed is a great abuse, and I hold that a title is useless to a real man."

"And you are right," said De Bragelonne, quietly.

"But I maintain, on the contrary," returned De Wardes, in an obstinate tone, "I maintain also that it is I who am right."

"What was it you said, monsieur?"

"I said that everything is being done in France to humiliate men of birth."

"And who is doing so?" inquired Raoul.

"The King especially. He is surrounded with people not one of whom can show four quarterings."

"Oh, nonsense!" said De Guiche. "Where the devil can you have seen all that, De Wardes?"

"I 'll give you an example."

And De Wardes riveted his eyes on Bragelonne while speaking.

"Go on," said De Guiche.

"Do you know who has just been named captain general of the musketeers, a post higher than that of a peer, a post that gives its holder precedence over all the marshals of France?"

Raoul's face began to grow red. He saw what De Wardes was driving at.

"No," replied De Guiche. "Who has been appointed? The appointment must have been quite recent, at all events. It is not more than a week since the office became vacant. And, as a proof of the fact, I know that Monsieur asked the post for one of his friends and met with a refusal."

"Well, my dear fellow, the King refused to appoint one of Monsieur's friends because he wanted to bestow the post upon the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a cadet of Gascony, who has been trailing his sword in ante-chambers for the last thirty years."

"Excuse me, monsieur, if I interrupt you," said Raoul, sternly. "But I gather from your words that you are entirely unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you speak."

"I unacquainted with M. d'Artagnan! But, good heavens! who *is* acquainted with him?"

"Those who are acquainted with him, monsieur," rejoined Raoul, calmly and coldly, "are bound to say that if his lineage

is not as lofty as the King's, which is not his fault, he is the equal of any king on earth in valor and loyalty. Such is my opinion, monsieur, and thank God, I have been acquainted with M. d'Artagnan since the day of my birth."

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche intervened.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

MADAME'S PORTRAIT.

De Guiche had seen plainly that the dispute was likely to become bitter.

In fact, Bragelonne's features wore an expression of instinctive hostility.

De Wardes' face, on the other hand, showed that he wished to be intentionally offensive. Although he did not entirely fathom the sentiments that actuated his two friends, De Guiche felt he must try to parry the blow which was likely to be dealt by one of them, or perhaps by both.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we must now separate, and before doing so, appoint a place of meeting. You will come with me to the Louvre, De Wardes. You, Raoul, will consider yourself master of the house, and as you have control of everything that is done here, you will give a final glance to the preparations I have made for my departure."

Raoul, like a man who neither seeks nor avoids a quarrel, nodded in sign of assent, and sat down on a bench in the sunlight.

"Good," said De Guiche, "stay where you are, Raoul, and make them show you the two horses I purchased recently. You will give me your opinion on them, for I bought them subject to your ratification of the bargain. And, by the way, forgive me. I was nearly forgetting to inquire after M. le Comte de la Fère."

While uttering the last words, he kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and tried to see the effect produced on him by the mention of Raoul's father.

"Thanks," answered the young man, "M. le Comte is in good health."

A flash of hatred passed into De Wardes' eyes.

De Guiche did not seem to notice the baleful gleam, but went and took Raoul's hand.

"You understand that you are to join me in the court of the Palais-Royal, Raoul?" said he.

Then beckoning to De Wardes, who was balancing himself, now on one foot, now on the other, he said:

"Time for us to be starting; come, M. Malicorne."

That name made Raoul start.

He fancied he had heard it somewhere before; but he could not remember where. While he was endeavoring to do so, being partly in a dreamy mood, and partly in a state of irritation on account of his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men took their way to the Palais-Royal, where Monsieur resided.

Malicorne was astute enough to see two things clearly. The first was that the two young noblemen had something to say to each other. The second that it would not be wise to march in the same line with them. He fell behind, therefore.

"Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, when they were a few yards outside the Hôtel Grammont, "to attack M. d'Artagnan, and that before Raoul?"

"Well, what follows?" asked De Wardes.

"What do you mean by saying, 'What follows'?"

"My meaning is clear enough. Is it forbidden to attack M. d'Artagnan?"

"But you are well aware that M. d'Artagnan is the fourth of that glorious and terrible band who are known as the musketeers?"

"Granted. But I do not see that that is any reason why I should not hate M. d'Artagnan."

"What has he done to you?"

"Done to me? Nothing."

"Then why hate him?"

"Go ask the shade of my father."

"Really, De Wardes, you surprise me. D'Artagnan is not one of those men who leave an unsettled account behind them. Your father, as I have heard, was a man who carried things with a high hand. Now, there are no enmities so bitter that they cannot be washed away by the blood that flows from an honest and loyal sword-thrust."

"What can I do, my dear friend? This hatred existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan. This hatred my father

fostered in me when I was yet a child. This hatred he has bequeathed me as a part of my inheritance."

"And is M. d'Artagnan alone the object of this hatred?"

"Oh, M. d'Artagnan has been too intimately associated with his three friends for a portion of it not to overflow its borders and fall on them. There is enough of it to prevent them from complaining that they have not received their due share of it, whenever the opportunity occurs."

De Guiche had his eyes riveted on De Wardes. He shuddered when he observed the pale smile on the young man's lips. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind. He said to himself that the time was past for doughty and valorous strokes interchanged between gentlemen, but that this feeling of hatred, confined to the recesses of the heart, instead of finding an outlet, was not the less deadly on that account; that a smile was sometimes as sinister as a menace; that, in short, after the fathers, who had hated with their hearts and fought with their arms, would come the sons, and that they, too, would hate with their hearts, but that their weapons would be intrigue and treachery.

Now, as Raoul was the last person in the world whom any one could suspect of intrigue or treachery, it was for Raoul that De Guiche shuddered.

But while these sombre thoughts were darkening his face, De Wardes had recovered all his self-possession.

"In any case," said he, "I have no personal quarrel with M. de Bragelonne; in fact, I do not know him."

"However that may be," returned De Guiche, sternly, "you must not forget that Raoul is my friend."

De Wardes bowed.

With this the conversation changed somewhat; but although De Guiche exerted all his ingenuity to draw out his companion's secret, De Wardes was resolved to keep it to himself and remained impenetrable.

De Guiche hoped, however, to be more successful in dealing with Raoul.

Meanwhile they had arrived at the Palais-Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of curious spectators.

Monsieur's household were waiting for his orders to take horse and escort the ambassadors charged with the duty of conducting the young princess to Paris.

Such a magnificent display of horses, arms, and liveries was

regarded at that time, when the people, under the influence of ancient traditions, were respectfully and devotedly attached to their kings, as a compensation for the enormous expenses appropriated for the purpose from the taxes.

Mazarin had said: "Let them sing, provided they pay."

Louis XIV. said: "Let them see."

Seeing had taken the place of singing. There was no prohibition against the former; the latter was no longer allowed.

M. de Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the bottom of the grand staircase, while he himself, a sharer in the prince's favor with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who smiled on him and hated him, proceeded directly to Monsieur's apartments.

He found him engaged in rouging his cheeks and admiring his face in a mirror.

In a corner of the room the Chevalier de Lorraine lay stretched on a pile of cushions; he had just had his long fair locks curled, and was toying with them like a woman.

The prince turned round at the noise made by the count's entrance.

"Ah! it 's you, Guiche," said he; "come here and tell me the truth."

"Yes, Monseigneur; you know truthfulness is my greatest defect."

"Just fancy, Guiche! That abominable chevalier has been annoying me dreadfully."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, how did that happen?" asked the count; "it is not his custom."

"Well," continued the prince, "he insists that Madame Henrietta is handsomer as a woman than I am as a man."

"Take care, Monseigneur!" returned De Guiche, with a frown; "you see you have asked me for the truth."

"Yes," replied Monsieur, almost trembling.

"Well, I am ready to tell it to you."

"But don't be in a hurry, Guiche," exclaimed the prince. "Take time to think. Examine me attentively and try also to remember Madame's features; besides, this is her portrait, look at it."

And he handed him an exquisitely finished miniature.

De Guiche took the portrait and looked at it for a long time.

"Upon my soul, Monseigneur," said he, "that is a ravishing face."

"Yes, but look at mine, look at mine," cried the prince, endeavoring to divert to himself the attention of the count, who was wrapped up in the contemplation of the portrait.

"It is really marvellous!" murmured De Guiche.

"What's that you say?" cried the prince. "One would think to hear you you had never seen that little girl before!"

"Yes, Monseigneur, I have seen her, but that was five years ago. There is a great difference between a child of twelve and a young girl of seventeen."

"Ay, but it's your opinion I want; your opinion, speak."

"My opinion is that this portrait must really flatter her, Monseigneur."

"Oh, yes, that's quite certain!" exclaimed the prince, triumphantly. "But suppose it did not flatter her, what would be your opinion, then?"

"Monseigneur, your Highness is very lucky to have so charming a bride."

"Oh, of course. But I don't want your opinion about her; I want your opinion about me."

"My opinion is, Monseigneur, that you are far too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine broke into a roar of laughter.

Monsieur saw clearly that the Comte de Guiche's opinion was intended to be anything but complimentary.

He frowned.

"My friends are not inclined to be very sympathetic," said he.

De Guiche was still gazing at the portrait. After a few moments he handed it back reluctantly to the prince.

"Decidedly," said he, "I would rather look a score of times at your Highness than once at Madame."

The chevalier must have seen a mysterious meaning in these words, which had no significance for the prince, for he cried:

"Well, why don't you get married also?"

Monsieur went on rouging his face. When he had finished he looked at the portrait, then looked in the glass and smiled.

Doubtless the comparison satisfied him.

"At all events," said he to De Guiche, "it was very nice of you to come to see me. I was afraid you intended starting without paying me a visit."

"You know me too well, Monseigneur, to believe I could be guilty of such an impropriety."

"And perhaps you have some favor to ask of me before leaving Paris?"

"Yes, your Highness has surmised correctly; I have a request to make of you."

"Good. What is it?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine listened eagerly. He looked on every favor granted to another as a robbery committed on himself.

As De Guiche showed some hesitation, the prince asked:

"Is it money you want? You come at a lucky time, for I am rolling in riches. The superintendent has just sent me fifty thousand pistoles."

"Thanks, your Highness; but money is not in question."

"Well, what is it you want, then?"

"A maid of honor's brevet."

"Odds-fish! what an interest you take in such people, Guiche!" replied the prince, scornfully. "Will you never have anything to talk to me about except these jades?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled. He knew that nothing was more displeasing to the prince than any interest shown in women.

"Monseigneur," answered De Guiche, "it is not I who am directly interested in the young person I have come to speak about: it is one of my friends."

"Oh, that's another matter. What is the name of your friend's *protégée?*"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière, at present maid of honor to the dowager duchess."

"Oh! oh! A girl that limps!" cried the Chevalier de Lorraine, sprawling on his cushions.

"A girl that limps!" repeated the prince, "and constantly before Madame's eyes! *Ma foi!* no; it may have dangerous consequences when Madame is pregnant."

The chevalier burst out laughing.

"M. le Chevalier," said De Guiche, "you are not behaving generously; I am soliciting a favor, and you are doing your best to injure me."

"Ah, excuse me, M. le Comte," answered the chevalier, who was somewhat alarmed at the tone in which the count accentuated his words; "such was not my intention, and in fact, I believe I have got this lady mixed up with another."

"I am perfectly convinced, monsieur, that you have done so."

"Well, Guiche, are you particularly anxious to have this brevet?" inquired the prince.

"I am, Monseigneur."

"Then it is granted. But don't ask for another one, for there are no more to be given away."

"Ah!" cried the chevalier; "noon already; it is the hour appointed for our departure."

"So you want to get rid of me, monsieur?" De Guiche asked.

"Oh, count, how unjust you are to me to-day!" answered the chevalier, feelingly.

"For goodness' sake, count; for goodness' sake, chevalier! don't quarrel," said Monsieur. "Do you not see the pain you are giving me?"

"And what about my brevet?" inquired De Guiche.

"Take one out of that drawer and give it to me."

De Guiche took a blank brevet with one hand, dipped a pen in ink with the other, and presented brevet and pen to the prince.

The prince signed.

"Stay," said he, "I am doing this upon one condition."

"What is it?"

"You must make friends with the chevalier."

"Willingly," said De Guiche.

And he offered his hand to the chevalier with an indifference that was very like contempt.

"Go, count," returned De Lorraine, apparently taking no notice of the contemptuous bearing of De Guiche; "go and bring us back a princess who is not fond of gossiping with her own portrait."

"Yes, set off at once and lose no time. By the way, whom are you taking with you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Valiant companions, both."

"Too valiant, perhaps," said the chevalier; "try to bring them both back safe, count."

"What a villainous heart the fellow has!" murmured De Guiche. "He scents mischief everywhere, hopes for it beyond everything!"

And after saluting Monsieur he retired.

When he reached the vestibule he waved the brevet that had just been signed.

Malicorne hurried up and took it from him, trembling with joy.

But after looking it over he showed that he expected something besides.

"Patience, monsieur, patience," said De Guiche to his client. "The Chevalier de Lorraine was present and I was afraid if I asked too much at a time I should get nothing. Wait until my return. Adieu."

"Adieu, M. le Comte, a thousand thanks," said Malicorne.

"And send Manicamp to me. By the way, is it true that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is lame?"

Just as he uttered these words, a horse came to a halt behind him.

He turned round. It was Raoul, who had entered the court and was quite pale. The poor lover had heard the question. Malicorne had not, being already out of reach of De Guiche's voice.

"Why were they talking of Louise?" Raoul wondered. "Oh! let that De Wardes, who is smiling yonder, take good care never to mention her name in my presence!"

"Now, gentlemen," cried De Guiche, "it is time to be off."

At this moment the prince, having completed his toilet, came to one of the windows.

The entire escort hailed his appearance with loud cheers, and ten minutes later banners, scarfs, and feathers were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

AT HAVRE.

All these brilliant, joyous courtiers, some of whom were animated by such antagonistic sentiments, reached Havre four hours after leaving Paris. It was about five in the afternoon when they arrived, and there had been no news of Madame so far.

They set about finding lodgings immediately; but this gave rise to much confusion among the masters and many quarrels among their lackeys. In the midst of this disorder the Comte de Guiche thought he recognized Manicamp.

It was Manicamp, sure enough, but since Malicorne had appropriated his finest suit, he was dressed in a costume of violet velvet embroidered in gold, the only one he had been able to ransom.

The dress was as well known to De Guiche as Manicamp's face, for he had often seen him in this violet garb, which was usually his last resource.

Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches which seemed to have set on fire rather than illuminated the porch by which Havre was entered, and which was situated next to the tower of François I.

When the count observed Manicamp's melancholy features, he could not keep from laughing.

"What, my poor Manicamp!" he cried; "all in violet? Are you in mourning, then?"

"Yes, I am in mourning," replied Manicamp.

"For whom or for what?"

"For my blue and gold suit, which has departed. All I could find to replace it was this, and even this I could only ransom by the severest economy."

"You don't say so?"

"*Pardieu!* You do well to pretend to be astonished, after leaving me without money!"

"Well, you're here anyway, and that's the main point."

"And the roads I came by were execrable."

"Where are you staying?"

"Where am I staying?"

"Yes."

"I'm staying nowhere."

De Guiche burst out laughing.

"Then where do you intend staying?"

"Where you stay."

"But I don't know that myself."

"Eh! you don't know?"

"How should I? I don't know where I shall lodge."

"But, have you not secured a hôtel?"

"I?"

"You or Monsieur?"

"Neither of us ever thought of such a thing. Havre is big enough, I fancy, and I suppose we can get stables for twelve horses and a suitable house in a good quarter —"

"Oh, there are plenty of suitable houses."

"Well, then, in that case —"

"They 're not for us."

"Not for us? And for whom are they?"

"For the English, *parbleu!*"

"For the English?"

"Yes, they have hired them all."

"Who has done so?"

"The Duke of Buckingham."

"What do you mean?" cried De Guiche, who pricked up his ears on hearing that name.

"Yes, my dear fellow, the Duke of Buckingham has hired them. His grace sent a courier before him. The courier arrived three days ago, and has laid hold of all the habitable habitations in this blessed town."

"Come, now, Manicamp, let us try to understand each other."

"By my faith, my meaning is plain enough, I imagine."

"What the devil, man! The Duke of Buckingham can't occupy all Havre!"

"He does not occupy it now: he 's not yet landed; but once he is, you may take my word for it, he will occupy it."

"Oh! oh!"

"It 's pretty plain you don't understand the English; they have a mania for grabbing everything."

"That 's all very well. But a man who has a whole house at his disposal does n't care for two."

"Yes, but suppose there are two men?"

"Granted. Then two houses; four, six, ten, if you like. But there are a hundred such houses in Havre, are there not?"

"Well, the whole hundred are let."

"Impossible!"

"But, you obstinate fellow, am I not telling you that Buckingham has hired all the houses in the neighborhood of the one in which the queen dowager of England and the princess her daughter are to lodge?"

"Aha! There is something queer about all that," said De Wardes, stroking his horse's neck.

"It is rather singular, monsieur," answered Manicamp.

"But are you quite sure of what you are telling us, M. de Manicamp?" asked De Wardes; and he looked sarcastically

at De Guiche, as if to inquire whether he thought his friend right in his head.

Meanwhile night had fallen, and the torches, pages, lackeys, grooms, horses, and carriages blocked up the gate and the square in front of it. The torches were reflected in the canal, which the rising tide was filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be seen a thousand inquisitive faces belonging to sailors and citizens determined to lose nothing of the spectacle.

During all this confusion, Bragelonne, as if a stranger to the scene, remained on his horse, a little in the rear of De Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected in the water, inhaling with rapture the salt perfumes of the waves that were breaking on the strand and shingle and sea-weed, hurling their foam into the air and their thunders into space.

"But then," cried De Guiche, "what possible motive can Buckingham have for renting such a number of lodgings?"

"Yes," asked De Wardes, "what is his motive?"

"Oh, he has an excellent one," answered Manicamp.

"But are you aware of it?"

"I think I am."

"Well, let us know it," said De Guiche.

"Lean over your head this way."

"*Diable!* is your communication one that can be told only in secret?"

"You can judge afterwards."

"Very well."

De Guiche leaned toward him.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I don't understand you at all."

"Say rather that you don't understand me yet."

"Explain yourself."

"Well, it is already beginning to be believed that his royal Highness Monsieur is destined to be the most unfortunate of husbands."

"What! the Duke of Buckingham would —"

"That name is pregnant with misfortune for the princes of the House of France."

"So the duke —"

"Is madly in love with Madame and would have no one come near her except himself."

De Guiche colored.

"Thanks, thanks!" said he, squeezing Manicamp's hand.

Then, becoming master of himself again:

"For God's sake!" said he to Manicamp, "take every precaution to prevent this report from reaching French ears, for if it does, swords will flash in the light of our French sun that do not fear English steel."

"After all," returned Manicamp, "there is no proof of the existence of this passion; it may be only an idle tale."

"No," answered De Guiche, "it must be the truth."

And the young man could not keep from grinding his teeth.

"But in any case, what is it to you or to me if Monsieur become what the late King was? Buckingham's father and the old Queen, Buckingham's son and the young princess, how does it concern us?"

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"Oh, *que diable!* if it isn't a fact, it's a rumor, anyway."

"Silence!" said the count.

"Why should he be silent?" returned De Wardes; "it is a fact that reflects credit on the French nation. Do you not agree with me, M. de Bragelonne?"

"What fact are you speaking of?" answered Raoul, absently.

"That in this way the English pay homage to the beauty of our queens and princesses."

"Excuse me, I did not follow what you said. Would you oblige me by repeating it?"

"Of course. I said that it was absolutely necessary for the Duke of Buckingham's father to come to Paris in order to convince Louis XIII. that his wife was one of the loveliest persons in the French court, and that now the presence of his son in Paris is necessary in order to give a sort of consecration to the beauty of a princess belonging to the House of France by the homage which he pays to it. The fact of having inspired such a passion on the other side of the channel will henceforth place the beauty of its object beyond dispute."

"Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, "I do not like joking on such a subject. By our birth we are the guardians of the honor of our queens and princesses. If we make light of them, what are our lackeys likely to do?"

"Oh!" exclaimed De Wardes, whose ears tingled, "how am I to take that, monsieur?"

"Take it as you like, monsieur," coldly replied Bragelonne.

"Bragelonne! Bragelonne!" murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes!" cried Manicamp, seeing the young man spur his horse to Raoul's side.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the very street. De Wardes, you are in the wrong."

"Wrong! how? I demand an answer."

"Wrong in always speaking evil of some one or of something," replied Raoul, with implacable sternness.

"Be a little more lenient, Raoul," whispered De Guiche.

"And don't fight until you have had a sleep," said Manicamp. "If you do, your fighting won't amount to much."

"Time to march," cried De Guiche; "forward, gentlemen, forward!"

And thereupon, breaking through horses and pages, he pushed his way through the crowd to the square, drawing the whole line of Frenchmen in his train.

A huge gate opening on a court stood wide open; De Guiche entered this court, and was followed by Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen.

Here a sort of council of war was held. The question under discussion was what means ought to be adopted to save the dignity of the embassy.

Bragelonne was of opinion that the right of priority should be respected.

De Wardes proposed they should sack the city.

It was Manicamp's impression, however, that this would be going a little too far. He proposed they should sleep on it. All admitted the wisdom of the suggestion. Unfortunately there was a difficulty in the way. To sleep you must have a house and beds.

De Guiche remained in a brown study for a time. Then he jumped up and shouted:

"Let him who loves me follow me!"

"And the lackeys also?" inquired a page who had drawn near the group.

"Everybody!" cried the fiery young man. "Come, Manicamp, lead us to the house which is to be occupied by her royal Highness Madame."

His friends, although utterly ignorant of the count's plans, followed him, escorted by a crowd of citizens whose joyous

acclamations were a happy omen for the success of the project, as yet unknown, of these ardent youths.

The wind was blowing fiercely from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

AT SEA.

The weather the next day was somewhat better, although the wind continued to blow. The sun, however, had risen through a bank of crimson clouds and tinged with its reddish beams the crests of the dark waves.

From the tops of the various watch-towers an eager look-out was kept up.

Toward eleven in the forenoon a vessel was descried; it was a ship with sails full set, and two other vessels followed in its wake at a distance of about half a knot.

They came forward rapidly, like arrows shot from the bow of a stout archer, and yet the sea was so rough that their speed was as nothing compared to the rolling of the waves, which drove them at one time to the right, at another to the left.

The lines of their hulls and their red pennants quickly revealed the presence of an English fleet. The vessel which had the princess on board and bore the admiral's flag was in front.

Immediately the news of the princess's coming was spread throughout the city, and all the French nobles made for the harbor; the people rushed in crowds to the quays and jetties.

Two hours later the other vessels had overtaken the flag-ship, and the three vessels, doubtless shrinking from venturing to enter the narrow neck of the harbor, cast anchor between Havre and La Hève.

When the manœuvre was successfully accomplished, the flagship saluted France with a salvo of twelve cannon, and was replied to with a similar salvo by Fort François I.

At once a hundred boats put out to sea. They were hung with the richest stuffs and destined for the conveyance of the French gentlemen to the vessels at anchor.

But those who perceived that they were tossed to and fro, even inside the harbor; those who perceived that even a little beyond the jetty the billows rose mountain high and then broke on the strand with a terrible roar, knew well that not one of these barks could ever go a quarter of the distance without foundering.

However, despite wind and sea, a pilot boat was making ready to leave the port and place itself at the orders of the admiral.

De Guiche, who had been searching among the different boats for a craft that was stronger than the others and might give him a chance of reaching the English flotilla, saw that the pilot-boat was about to start.

"Raoul," said he, "is it not shameful that stout, intelligent fellows like us should recoil baffled before the presence of the brute forces of wind and water?"

"Just what I was saying in my own mind," answered Raoul.

"Well, what if we were to enter that boat and push forward? What do you say, De Wardes?"

"You had better not, or you'll surely get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And all for nothing," added De Wardes, "for, with such a head wind, you never could come near those vessels."

"You refuse, then?"

"Decidedly. I might be willing to lose my life in a struggle with men," he answered, looking askance at Raoul, "but I have n't the slightest taste for fighting salt water with oars."

"As for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I sure of reaching the English vessels, I should n't be at all anxious to risk the ruin of the only decent suit left me. The salt water would splash and soil it."

"So you refuse also?"

"Most assuredly. Be kind enough to understand that plainly."

"But look," cried De Guiche, "look, De Wardes, and you, Manicamp, look yonder. The queen and the princess are observing us from the poop of the flagship!"

"An additional reason why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by taking a salt-water bath before their very eyes."

"So that is your last answer, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"And yours, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I go alone."

"No," said Raoul, "I go with you. If I don't mistake, we have settled on that already."

For all that, Raoul, who was not influenced by passion and could calmly measure the risk, saw clearly all the danger they were going to run. But he was well pleased to have the chance of encountering a peril from which De Wardes had recoiled.

The boat was now ready to set out. De Guiche hailed the skipper.

"Stay," he cried, "we want two places in your boat!"

And wrapping up five or six pistoles in a piece of paper, he threw it to him from the quay.

"Apparently salt water does n't frighten you, young gentlemen," said the skipper.

"We are afraid of nothing," returned De Guiche.

"Then come along, my masters."

The pilot came to the side of the boat, and the young men lightly jumped on board.

"Courage, lads," said De Guiche; "there are twenty pistoles still left in this purse, and when we reach the flagship they are yours."

The rowers at once bent to their oars, and the boat leaped over the crests of the waves.

Every one took an interest in this venturesome expedition; the whole population of Havre flocked to the jetties, and their eyes were riveted on the gallant bark.

Sometimes the frail craft remained suspended for a moment upon the crest of the foaming waves, then it suddenly sank to the bottom of a roaring abyss and was lost to sight.

Nevertheless, after a desperate struggle, lasting an hour, it entered the waters in which the flagship lay at anchor. Two boats had been despatched already by the English admiral to their assistance.

Upon the quarter-deck of the flagship, protected by a canopy of ermine and velvet, which was upheld by powerful supports, sat the young princess and her mother the queen dowager, having near them the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk. They were gazing fearfully at that little bark, which at one time seemed dashed against the heavens, at another sinking into the depths of hell, and at the noble faces of the two French

gentlemen that stood out against the dark sail like two luminous apparitions.

The crew, who were leaning against the bulwarks or had climbed into the shrouds, cheered heartily at the bravery of the two fearless young men, the skill of the pilot, and the vigorous endurance of the rowers.

When De Guiche and Raoul were at the side of the vessel they were greeted with a hurrah.

The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man of twenty-six or twenty-seven, advanced to receive them.

They clambered nimbly up the ladder on the larboard side, and escorted by the duke, they approached to offer their homage to the royal ladies.

A feeling of reverence and another feeling which resembled terror had so far prevented De Guiche from observing the young princess with much attention.

On the other hand, the count had attracted her notice especially; she had inquired of her mother:

"Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?"

The queen, who was better acquainted with Monsieur than her daughter, had smiled at a mistake prompted by vanity, and had answered:

"No, it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite."

On receiving this response, the princess had felt constrained to repress a certain tenderness of feeling awakened by the count's daring.

It was at the moment the princess was putting this question that De Guiche found courage to raise his eyes to the face of the princess and compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen.

When he beheld that pale countenance, the sparkling eyes, the lovely nut-brown hair, the expressive mouth, and those gestures, which were so supremely royal, and seemed to give at once thanks and encouragement, he was so overcome that but for Raoul, who took his arm, he must have tottered.

The look of surprise in his friend's eyes, and the friendly gesture of the queen, enabled him to regain his self-control.

He explained his mission in a few words, told how he had happened to become Monsieur's envoy, and then saluted, according to their rank and the reception he met with from them, the English lords who stood around the queen and the princess.

Raoul was presented next, and graciously received. Every-

body was aware of the part played by the Comte de la Fère in the Restoration, and also that he had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage that was to conduct back to France the granddaughter of Henri IV.

Raoul spoke English perfectly, and acted as interpreter between his friend and the young English noblemen who were not familiar with French.

At this moment a young man advanced whose beauty was as remarkable as his costume and arms were splendid. He drew near the royal ladies, who were conversing with the Duke of Norfolk, and in tones that betrayed his impatience, said:

"It is now time for your Majesty and your royal Highness to debark."

The princess at once rose and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman offered her with an eagerness that sprang from a variety of motives, when the admiral came and stood between them.

"Excuse me, my lord duke," he said, "the sea is too high for ladies to land at present. The wind will probably subside about four o'clock; we shall not land, therefore, before evening."

"I must ask your grace to pardon me," answered Buckingham, with an irritation he did not even attempt to disguise. "You have no right to keep those ladies on board. One of them belongs now, unfortunately, to France, and, as you see, France claims her by the voice of her ambassadors."

And he pointed to De Guiche and Raoul, saluting them at the same time.

"I do not suppose," returned the admiral, "that these gentlemen wish to expose the lives of these ladies to any peril?"

"My lord duke, these gentlemen have come hither with the wind against them. Allow me to say that, as these ladies will depart with the wind in their favor, their peril will not be very serious."

"These gentlemen have shown themselves very brave," said the admiral. "You saw yourself that there were many persons on the quay who did not venture to follow them. Moreover, their eagerness to pay homage to Madame and her illustrious mother at the earliest possible moment led them to defy the dangers of a sea that has been very rough to-day, even in the opinion of sailors. But the example of these gentlemen, which is so admirable that I purpose proposing it for

the imitation of my officers, can hardly be expected to be followed by these royal ladies."

The princess, happening to glance in the direction of the Comte de Guiche, saw that the blood had surged to his face.

Buckingham, however, did not notice that look. His eyes were riveted on Norfolk. He was evidently jealous of the admiral, and seemed to be violently determined on removing the princess from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme.

"In that case," Buckingham resumed, "I can only appeal to Madame herself."

"And I, my lord duke, can only appeal to my conscience, and my sense of responsibility. I have promised to convey Madame safely to France, and I intend to fulfil my promise."

"But yet—"

"Will your grace allow me to remind you that I alone am master here?"

"Does your grace know what you are saying?" retorted Buckingham, haughtily.

"Perfectly, and I repeat it. I alone command here, and all obey me — wind and sea, ships and men."

These words were uttered grandly and nobly. Raoul noticed the effect they produced on Buckingham. A shiver ran through his whole body. He leaned against one of the supports of the canopy to avoid falling. His eyes became bloodshot, and the hand not used to sustain him wandered to the hilt of his sword.

"My lord duke," said the queen, "permit me to state that I fully agree with the Duke of Norfolk. Even if the sky, instead of being hidden by clouds, as it is at the present moment, were perfectly clear and favorable, we could afford to give a few hours to the officer who has conducted us, under such happy auspices, and with such singular care, to that coast where he is to bid us farewell."

Buckingham, instead of replying, sought an answer in the expression of Madame's face.

But Madame, half concealed by the curtains of velvet and gold that sheltered her, was evidently paying no attention to the discussion; she was entirely taken up with observing the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul.

This was a fresh blow to Buckingham, who imagined he saw in Madame's face an expression deeper than mere curiosity.

He retired with tottering steps, stumbling on his way against the mainmast.

"The Duke of Buckingham has not the legs of a sailor," said the queen mother, in French. "I presume that is why he is so anxious to land."

The young man heard the words, turned pale, and let his arms fall dejectedly by his side. He withdrew, mingling in the same sigh his old love and his new hatreds.

However, the admiral did not trouble himself about Buckingham's ill-humor, but led the two ladies into the after-deck cabin, where dinner was served with a magnificence worthy of his guests. The admiral took his seat at the right hand of the princess and motioned the Comte de Guiche to be seated on her left.

It was the place usually occupied by Buckingham.

When he entered, then, and perceived that he had been relegated by etiquette, that other queen whom he was bound to respect, to a seat lower down than that which he had occupied until now, his vexation knew no bounds.

On the other hand, De Guiche, made paler on account of his happiness than his rival was on account of his discomfiture, sat down, trembling, beside the princess, whose silken robe, when it rustled against his body, made his whole being thrill with voluptuous shivers till then unknown to him. After the banquet, Buckingham darted forward to offer his hand to the princess.

But it was now De Guiche's turn to give a lesson to the duke.

"My lord duke," said he, "have the kindness to understand that from this moment you must not interfere between her royal Highness and me. From this moment her royal Highness belongs to France. And it is the hand of Monsieur, the King's brother, which touches her royal Highness' hand when she does me the honor to touch mine."

And while uttering these words, he offered his hand to Madame with such evident timidity, and at the same time with such fearless nobility of demeanor, that a murmur of admiration arose among the English, while a groan of pain escaped from the lips of Buckingham.

Raoul was in love. He understood it all.

He fixed upon his friend's face one of those searching looks, with which a friend or a mother can alone fathom, as pro-

tector or as guardian, the face of the child or the friend who is standing on the brink of danger.

At length, about two in the afternoon, the sun shone forth, the wind was hushed, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog which had hidden the coast was rent like a veil and quickly disappeared.

Then the smiling hills of France came into view, with their numberless white homes standing out against the azure sky and the green trees.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE TENTS.

The admiral, as we have seen, had determined to pay very little attention to Buckingham's threatening looks and convulsive furies. In fact, since his departure from England he must have grown quite familiar with them. De Guiche, on his side, had not yet taken any notice of the duke's evident animosity towards himself, but he felt instinctively that he had but small sympathy with the favorite of Charles II. The queen mother, with her wider experience and her greater composure and common sense, dominated the situation, and, as she understood its peril, she made her preparations to cut the Gordian knot when the proper time should arrive. The time for this had now come. All was serene everywhere, except in the heart of Buckingham, who was impatiently repeating to the princess in an undertone:

"In God's name, Madame, let us land at once, I implore you. Do you not see that that coxcomb Norfolk is killing me with the attentions and civilities he is offering you?"

Henrietta listened to his words. She smiled, but did not turn round. Giving to her voice that shade of gentle reproach and languid impertinence with which coquetry half assents to a statement while having the air of protesting against it, she murmured:

"Duke, I have already told you that your brain is addled."

None of these details, as, indeed, we have hinted already, escaped Raoul; he had heard Buckingham's entreaty, he had

heard the princess's answer; he had seen Buckingham start back on receiving this answer, heave a sigh, and dash his hand across his forehead, and, as no veil covered either his heart or his eyes, he understood everything, and shuddered at the condition of affairs, and the mental state of some of those around him.

At last the admiral, with studied slowness, gave the final order for launching the boats.

Buckingham heard this order with such transports that an impartial observer might easily have been led to the conclusion that the young man was really out of his senses.

When the Duke of Norfolk had spoken, a large barge, gayly decked with flags, was let down from the side of the flagship; it was capable of seating twenty rowers and fifteen passengers. Velvet carpets, tapestries embroidered with the English coat-of-arms, and emblematic garlands of flowers — for at that period such symbols were the usual concomitants of political alliances — adorned in splendid fashion the pinnace, making it in every way worthy of royalty.

But scarcely had the bark touched the waters, scarcely had the rowers uplifted their oars, waiting, like soldiers presenting arms, until the princess had stepped down the ladder, when Buckingham ran up to the side of the vessel, with the evident intention of following her.

His further progress was, however, stopped by the queen.

"It is hardly proper," said she, "that your grace should allow my daughter and myself to land without first ascertaining whether the lodgings prepared for us are in a fit condition to receive us. You will therefore have the kindness to go ashore before us and see that everything is in readiness for our arrival."

This was a terrible disappointment to the duke, the more so since it was entirely unexpected. He stammered, colored, but could not find an answer. He had been so sure he could keep near Madame during the passage to land and thus enjoy to the very end the few moments of happiness that fate still allotted him. But the order was explicit.

The admiral, who had heard it, shouted immediately:

"Let the gig be launched!"

The command was executed with all the speed that distinguishes manœuvres on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, utterly dejected, cast a despairing look on the

princess, a beseeching look on the queen, a look of anger on the admiral. The princess pretended not to see it. The queen turned away her head. The admiral laughed. When Buckingham heard that laugh, he felt impelled to strike Norfolk. The queen mother rose.

"Start at once, duke," she said, imperiously.

But looking round him and making a last effort:

"And do you, gentlemen," he asked, in a voice almost stifled by opposite emotions, "do you, M. de Bragelonne, and you, M. de Guiche, not go with me?"

De Guiche bowed.

"Like M. de Bragelonne," said he, "I await her Majesty's orders; whatever commands she may be pleased to give we shall obey."

And he turned his eyes on the young princess, who lowered hers.

"Excuse me, my lord of Buckingham," answered the queen, "but M. de Guiche is here the representative of Monsieur. It is his duty to do us the honors of France, as it has been yours to do us the honors of England. He cannot, therefore, free himself from the duty of accompanying us, and we owe him this slight favor besides for the courage he has displayed in coming to pay us his homage in such bad weather."

Buckingham opened his lips as if to answer; but no words fell from them, either because he could not find the words that would adequately clothe his thoughts or could not find the thoughts to put into words. He turned round, as if distracted, and leaped into the boat.

The rowers had barely time to catch hold of him and retain their own footing, for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the little craft.

"Undoubtedly he must be mad," the admiral said aloud to Raoul.

"I am afraid he is, your grace," answered Bragelonne.

During all the time the boat spent in making for shore, Buckingham never took his eyes off the flagship; he was like some miser torn away from his coffers, some mother bereft of her daughter when that daughter is to be led to the scaffold. But neither his signals of distress nor his woful attitudes met with the slightest response.

He was so stunned that he dropped on a bench, burying his

hand in his hair, while the careless sailors made their boat bound over the waves.

When he landed he was in such a state of stupor that had he not met the messenger whom he had sent before him to inspect the lodgings, he would not have been able to ask his way. Once arrived at the house that had been hired for him. he shut himself up like Achilles in his tent.

The boat which bore the royal ladies left the flagship when Buckingham had debarked. It was followed by another one containing officers, courtiers, and particular friends.

Crowds of Havre folk had embarked hastily in fishing-smacks, various flat-bottomed craft, and long Norman pinnaces, and struck out to meet the royal barge.

The guns of the forts fired a salute; the flagship responded, and the clouds of flame and smoke from the cannons' yawning mouths turned into white vapors and floated over the waves, at last vanishing in the azure skies.

The princess descended at the steps of the quay. Joyous music hailed her arrival and accompanied her throughout her progress.

While she was advancing toward the centre of the city, treading beneath her slender feet the rich carpets and gay flowers along her pathway, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hurried in a different direction and quickly reached the mansion set apart for Madame's residence.

"Let us get on," said Raoul, "for from the judgment I have formed of Buckingham's character, he will play us some ugly trick when he learns the result of our deliberations yesterday."

"Oh," answered De Guiche, "De Wardes is there, firmness personified, and Manicamp, who is gentleness itself."

Still De Guiche did not slacken his pace on that account, and in five minutes they were in sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The thing that first struck them was the immense number of people assembled on the square.

"Capital!" exclaimed De Guiche, "our lodgings, I see, are ready for us."

In fact, before the hotel and on the square itself rose eight tents of the most elegant appearance, surmounted by the flags of England and France. The edifice, indeed, had tents on every side of it, and was surrounded by them as by a girdle of

variegated colors. Ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, who had been assigned as an escort to the ambassadors, mounted guard in front.

The aspect of the whole scene was singular and curious, almost fairy-like.

These improvised dwellings, which had been erected during the night and fitted up, within and without, by De Guiche with the richest stuffs Havre was able to supply, completely encircled the Hôtel de Ville, that is to say, the temporary residence of the princess, and were connected by silken cables, guarded by sentinels, so that Buckingham's plan was entirely baffled, if his plan were really to prevent all access to the building except in the case of himself and his English companions. The only passage leading to it and not closed by this silken barricade was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened toward the entrance.

These two tents belonged to De Guiche and Raoul; in their absence that of De Guiche was to be occupied by De Wardes; that of Raoul by Manicamp.

A hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their silk and gold finery, swarmed around the tents like bees around a hive, and every one of them, with his sword by his side, stood ready to obey a sign from De Guiche or Bragelonne, the two leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment the two young men appeared at the end of a street leading to the square, they perceived, crossing it at full gallop, a young man garbed in a costume of marvellous richness and elegance. He pushed through the throng of spectators, and on seeing the tents uttered a cry of anger and despair.

It was Buckingham, who had recovered from his stupor, and had put on this dazzling costume in order to receive the queen and the princess at the Hôtel de Ville. But at the entrance to the tents his passage was barred, and he was compelled to halt. Buckingham, thoroughly exasperated, raised his whip; two officers seized his arm.

Of the two guardians of the two tents, only one was present. De Wardes was in the Hôtel de Ville, engaged in transmitting some orders given by De Guiche.

At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was lying indolently on some cushions in one of the two tents, rose with

his customary nonchalance. Perceiving that the disturbance continued, he came out from under the curtains.

"What is the matter?" he inquired gently, "and who is creating all this uproar?"

It so happened that just at the moment he began to speak, silence was restored, and although his voice was very soft and low, every one heard the question.

Buckingham wheeled round and stared at the tall thin figure and listless countenance of the speaker.

Probably the personal appearance of the gentleman, who, as we have said, was dressed very plainly, did not inspire him with a high degree of respect, for he said contemptuously:

"Who are you, monsieur?"

Manicamp leaned on the arm of a gigantic trooper — an arm as straight as the pillar of a cathedral — and in return asked with the utmost composure:

"And you, monsieur?"

"I? I am the Duke of Buckingham. I have hired all the houses around the Hôtel de Ville, where I have business; now, since I have hired these houses, they belong to me; and since I hired them in order to have a free passage to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to close that passage."

"But who has prevented you from passing?" inquired Manicamp.

"Your sentries."

"Because you wished to pass on horseback, and orders have been given that every one must pass on foot."

"No one has the right to give any orders here except myself," said Buckingham.

"And why?" asked Manicamp, in his smoothest tones. "Have the goodness to solve this riddle for me."

"Because, as I have told you, I have hired all the houses on the square."

"We are well aware of that, seeing that there was nothing left us but the square itself."

"You are mistaken, monsieur, the square is mine as well as the houses."

"Oh, excuse me, monsieur, you are in error. We have a saying amongst us that the highway belongs to the King: therefore the square belongs to the King; as we are the King's ambassadors, then, the square belongs to us."

"THESE BARRACKS OBSTRUCT MY VIEW; THEY MUST BE REMOVED!"

"Monsieur, I have already asked who you are," cried Buckingham, enraged at the speaker's coolness.

"My name is Manicamp," answered the young man, in a voice as soft and sweet as the tones of an Æolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said he, "when I hired these houses, the square was free; these barracks obstruct my view; they must be removed!"

A hoarse, threatening murmur arose from the spectators.

De Guiche came up at this moment; he pushed through the crowd that separated him from Buckingham, followed by Raoul; while he was approaching from one direction, De Wardes was approaching from another.

"I beg your grace's pardon," said he; "if you have any complaint to make, be kind enough to make it to me, as I am responsible for the construction of these tents."

"And might I take the liberty to observe," added Manicamp, graciously, "that the word 'barracks' is objected to?"

"Your grace was saying?" continued De Guiche.

"I was saying, M. le Comte," retorted Buckingham, in a tone of anger more marked than ever, although it was somewhat moderated by the presence of an equal, "I was saying that these tents cannot remain where they are."

"Cannot remain where they are!" returned De Guiche, "and why?"

"Because they annoy me."

De Guiche made an impatient gesture, but a warning look from Raoul restrained him.

"Your annoyance ought not to be as great as ours, considering the way in which you have abused your right of priority."

"Abused?"

"Decidedly. You sent a courier here who has hired in your name almost the entire city of Havre, careless of the fact that there were Frenchmen coming here to meet Madame. As the representative of a friendly nation, you have scarcely acted in a friendly manner."

"The right of possession belongs to the first occupant."

"Not in France, my lord duke."

"And why not in France?"

"Because France is the land of politeness."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Buckingham, so pas-

sionately that the spectators recoiled, expecting an immediate collision.

"It means," rejoined De Guiche, turning pale, "that I have had these tents erected as quarters for myself and my friends, as a refuge for the ambassadors of France, as the only shelter your encroachments have left us in the city; and it means that myself and my companions shall remain in them until an authority more powerful and, above all, more supreme than your own forbids us."

"In other words, until we are nonsuited, to use a legal term," added Manicamp, sweetly.

"I know an authority that, I hope, will satisfy you," said Buckingham, touching the hilt of his sword.

Whereupon, just as the Goddess of Discord was about to fire inflammatory hearts and sheathe swords in human breasts, Raoul lightly laid his hand on Buckingham's shoulder.

"A word with you, my lord duke," said he.

"My right! My right first!" cried the fiery young nobleman.

"The very point upon which I am desirous of having the honor of talking with you," replied Raoul.

"Then let your words be brief."

"As brief as you wish; only a question."

"Speak, I am listening."

"Is it you or the Duc d'Orleans that is about to wed the granddaughter of Henri IV.?"

"What do you insinuate by that?" replied Buckingham, recoiling and looking scared.

"Be so good as to answer me," persisted Raoul, quietly.

"Is it your purpose to ridicule me?" inquired Buckingham.

"That is a sort of answer, my lord duke, and I am satisfied with it. You acknowledge, then, that you are not the person who is about to wed the English princess?"

"You know well enough I am not, monsieur."

"Pardon me, but after witnessing your conduct, I have not been quite sure."

"Come to the point, monsieur; what do you mean by that?" Raoul came close to the duke.

"Your fits of madness," said he, lowering his voice, "bear a strong resemblance to fits of morbid jealousy; is your grace conscious of the fact? Now such fits of jealousy, on the part

of a man who is neither a lover nor a husband, are highly improper when their object is any woman, but infinitely more so — surely your grace must see that — when that woman is a princess."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, "you are insulting Madame Henrietta!"

"It is you," returned Raoul, coolly, "it is you who insult her. You had better take care. Lately, on the flagship, you exhausted the patience of the queen as well as of the admiral. I was watching you and at first I thought you were demented, but I have since guessed the real nature of your insanity."

"Monsieur!"

"Stay! I wish to add a few words more. I hope I am the only Frenchman who has guessed it."

"But are you aware, monsieur," answered Buckingham, who was trembling with uneasiness as well as with anger, "that the language in which you address me deserves to be checked?"

"Weigh your words," said Raoul, haughtily; "I am not of a race whose indiscretion requires to be checked; on the other hand, you belong to a family whose passions give ground for suspicion to all true Frenchmen. I repeat, then, for the second time, my lord duke, you had better take care."

"Take care of what? Can it really be possible that you dare to threaten me?"

"I am the son of the Comte de la Fère, your grace, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Though, yes, I do threaten, and my threat is this —"

Buckingham clinched his hands, but Raoul went on as though he perceived nothing.

"At the first word inconsistent with the respect you owe her royal Highness — oh, have patience, my lord of Buckingham, you see I have."

"You?"

"Yes, I. So long as the princess was on English territory, I was silent; but now that she is in France, now that we have received her in the prince's name, at the first insult your frenzied infatuation may drive you to offer to the House of France, I shall adopt one of two courses: I shall either proclaim, before all here, the madness by which you are affected

and have you ignominously sent back to England, or, if you prefer it, I shall drive my dagger through your throat, in the presence of all here also. The second alternative is the one that pleases me best, and I shall probably hold to it."

Buckingham had turned paler than the collar of English lace around his neck.

"M. de Bragelonne," said he, "is it really a gentleman who is speaking to me in this fashion?"

"Yes, but the gentleman is speaking to a madman; cure yourself, my lord duke, and you will find him speaking a different language."

"But, M. de Bragelonne," said the duke, hoarsely, "do you not see that I am dying?"

"If you died this moment," returned Raoul, with imperturbable composure, "I should regard your death as a great blessing, for it would put a stop to all sorts of injurious rumors as to yourself and the illustrious persons compromised by your foolish devotion."

"You are right, you are right!" cried the duke, wildly. "Better die than endure what I am suffering!"

And he half drew from his breast a beautifully-wrought poniard, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones.

Raoul thrust his hand aside.

"Hold!" said he, "if you do not kill yourself, you become ridiculous; if you do, you spatter with blood the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham gasped painfully for about a minute. Every muscle quivered, his lips trembled, his eyes wandered as though in delirium. Then, suddenly recovering, he said:

"M. de Bragelonne, I do not know a nobler heart than yours; you are the worthy son of the most perfect gentleman of my acquaintance. Keep your tents!"

And he threw his arms around Raoul's neck.

All the spectators, bewildered by a scene they had such little reason to expect, in view of the furious transports of one of the adversaries and the stern determination of the other, clapped their hands, and cheers and joyous acclamations arose on all sides.

De Guiche in turn embraced Buckingham, but with a good deal of reluctance.

Then French and English, who had been looking on

anxiously, threw themselves into one another's arms with enthusiasm.

And now the procession that escorted the queen and princess came into view; but for Bragelonne, the royal ladies would have seen two armies engaged in battle and the flowers that strewed their path stained with blood.

But there was perfect order when the banners appeared in sight.

CHAPTER LXXXVI

NIGHT.

The Goddess of Concord had returned to resume her throne among the tents. The only rivalry between the English and French now was as to which should show the most courteous attentions to the illustrious guests, and the most exquisite politeness to one another.

The English sent to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had laid in a plentiful supply in honor of the coming of the princess; the French invited the English to a supper which was to be given the next evening.

Madame was received with cheers and acclamations during her progress through the city. The respect displayed toward her by all was such as might be paid to a queen; the adoration proffered by some was such as might be paid to a goddess.

The queen mother greeted the Frenchmen who appeared before her with the warmest affection. France was the land of her birth, and she had been too unhappy in England to be allowed to forget her native country. She taught her daughter, then, by her own love for it, the love of that land where both had found hospitality and where a brilliant future awaited them.

When the public entry was over, when most of the spectators had dispersed, when the flourishes of the trumpets and the shouts of the multitude had faded away in the distance, and when night had enfolded in her starry veil the sea and the harbor, the city and the country, De Guiche returned to his tent and sat down on a broad stool with such an expression of agony on his face that Raoul kept his eyes fixed on him until he heard him heave a deep sigh. Then he approached. The

count had thrown himself back on his seat, and rested his shoulder against the partition of the tent, his face buried in his hands, gasping for breath and trembling in every limb.

"Are you in pain, my friend?" inquired Raoul.

"In terrible pain."

"In bodily pain?"

"Yes, yes."

"No wonder, it has been a harassing day," continued the young man, with his eyes riveted on his companion.

"Yes, but a sound sleep will make all right."

"Do you wish me to leave you?"

"No, I have to speak to you."

"But I must speak to you first, De Guiche."

"Very well. Go on."

"But will you be frank with me?"

"As I always am."

"Do you know why Buckingham was in such a rage?"

"I suspect the reason."

"You think he is in love with Madame?"

"One would swear he was, at least from seeing him."

"Well, there 's not an atom of truth in it."

"Oh, this time you are mistaken; I have read his love in his eyes, his gestures, in all his actions, ever since this morning."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and see poetry everywhere."

"I see love everywhere."

"You see it where it is n't."

"I see it where it is."

"Now, De Guiche, don't you think you might be in error?"

"No, no, I am sure of it," cried De Guiche, quickly.

"Come, now, count, would you tell me what it is that makes you so clear-sighted?" asked Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him.

"Oh!" answered De Guiche, hesitatingly; "self-approbation."

"Self-approbation; that is a mighty long word, De Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, my friend, that you are not usually so melancholy as you are to-night."

"It is because I 'm so tired."

"Tired?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow. We have campaigned together, we have been on horseback eighteen hours at a stretch, we have had three horses fall under each of us from sheer exhaustion or hunger, and yet we used to laugh at all that. You are not melancholy because you are tired, count."

"Then it is because I am annoyed."

"Annoyed how?"

"By what happened this evening."

"The Duke of Buckingham's folly?"

"Eh! why not? Is it not a source of vexation to us Frenchmen, the representatives of our royal master, to see an Englishman actually wooing our future mistress, the second lady of the realm?"

"Yes, you are right; but I do not think Buckingham is dangerous."

"No, but he is troublesome. Did he not very nearly embroil us with the English soon after he landed? In fact, but for your admirable prudence and singular determination, we must have drawn swords in the very middle of the city."

"Well, you see he has changed."

"Certainly I see it; but therein lies my amazement. You spoke in a very low tone to him. What did you say? You believe he loves her; you said as much. A strong passion, however, is not conquered so easily. He does not love her, then!"

And De Guiche uttered the last words in so strange a tone that Raoul raised his head.

It was easy to read the young man's disapproval on his noble features.

"What I said to him, count," he returned, "I will repeat to you. Pay close attention, these were my words: 'My lord duke, you have dared to look with eyes of insulting passion upon the sister of your prince, who is not betrothed to you and cannot be your mistress; you have, therefore, offered an affront to us who have come hither to conduct a young bride to her husband.'"

"You really said all that?" exclaimed De Guiche, becoming red.

"Yes, and I have even gone farther."

De Guiche started.

"'What should you think of us if you saw amongst us a man so insensate, so disloyal as to entertain any other sentiment

than the deepest reverence for a princess destined to be the spouse of our master ?' "

The words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale ; he shook to such a degree that he could barely offer his hand to Bragelonne, covering his eyes and forehead with the other.

" But," continued Raoul, " 'thank God !' I said, 'the French, who are regarded as impudent, thoughtless, and even reckless, can bring a sound judgment and the principles of a sound morality to bear on questions of such high importance. Learn, my lord duke, that the gentlemen of France sacrifice in the service of their kings their passions as well as their fortunes and their lives, and whenever the devil suggests one of those evil thoughts that inflame the heart, they extinguish that flame, though to do so they have to quench it with their blood. In this fashion we save at once our country's honor, our master's, and our own. That is how we act, my lord of Buckingham, and that is how every honorable and high-minded man must act.' And now, my dear De Guiche, you know what I said to Buckingham. He admitted the force of my arguments, and surrendered without resistance."

De Guiche, who had listened to Raoul with bowed head, drew himself up when he had finished, pride in his eye, though the hand that grasped that of Raoul still trembled. His cheeks, before cold as ice, now burned like fire.

" And you spoke admirably," he said hoarsely ; " and you are an honest friend, Raoul ; thanks. Now let me beg of you to leave me alone."

" You wish it ? " inquired Raoul.

" Yes, I have need of rest. Many things occurred to-day that have agitated me both in mind and body. When you return to-morrow, I shall not be the same man."

" Just as you like, then ; so I leave you," said Raoul, about to withdraw. The count went up to his friend and pressed him warmly in his arms.

But in this loving embrace Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a mighty internal conflict.

It was a beautiful night, the air was cool, and the heavens were studded with stars. After the storm was over, the genial warmth of the sun had returned, bringing in its train life, peace, and security everywhere. A few long thin clouds floated across the sky, their blended blue and white colors giving

promise of a succession of fine days tempered by eastern breezes. Upon the square of the Hôtel de Ville the broad shadows of the tents, cross-barred and checkered by the bright moonbeams, formed, as it were, a huge mosaic of black and white plates.

Soon the whole city was fast asleep, though a feeble light was still shining in one of Madame's apartments that overlooked the square, and the soft brightness of this expiring lamp seemed but as an image of the calm repose of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of existence, in whom the flame of life grows dim when the body slumbers.

Bragelonne quitted his tent, with the slow and measured gait of a man who is anxious to see, but does not wish to be seen.

Sheltered behind its thick curtains, and able to embrace the whole square in a glance, he had seen the curtains of the entrance to De Guiche's tent shaken and then half opened. Behind them he was able to perceive the shadow of De Guiche, whose eyes shone in the darkness and were gazing ardently at Madame's drawing-room, now faintly illuminated by the light in the adjoining chamber.

That soft light which dimly shone through the windows was the count's star. All the aspirations of his soul had mounted to his eyes. Raoul, hidden in the shadow, surmised the nature of the impassioned thoughts which established between the tent of the youthful ambassador and the balcony of the princess a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy, a bond created by thoughts stamped with such strength and resolution that they ought certainly to have wooed amorous dreams to descend on that perfumed couch, which the count with the eyes of the soul devoured so eagerly.

But there were other watchers beside De Guiche and Raoul. The window of one of the houses on the square was open; it was the window of the house in which lived Buckingham.

Aided by the reflection of the light that issued from this latter window a spectator might see plainly the profile of the duke as he leaned indolently against the velvet hangings of the window-frame. He, too, was directing his prayers and his wild visions of love toward the balcony of Madame.

Bragelonne could not help smiling.

"Yonder is a poor heart that is closely besieged," he murmured, thinking of the princess.

And then he added compassionately, when he thought of Monsieur:

"And in another quarter is a husband seriously menaced. Well for him that he is a great prince, and has an army to protect his property."

Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two despairing lovers, listened to the loud-resounding and almost indecent snoring of Manicamp, who snored as haughtily as if he had on his blue instead of his violet costume, then turned his face to the breeze, which carried to his ears the distant song of the nightingale, and after having thus stored up a due supply of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to bed, imagining as he did so that perhaps four or even six eyes, quite as ardent as those of Buckingham or De Guiche, were lying in wait for a glimpse of his own idol in the Château of Blois.

"And Mademoiselle de Montalais is not by any means a safe garrison, either," he whispered to himself, as he heaved a loud sigh.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

On the next day the fêtes were celebrated; they were marked by all the pomp and gayety which the resources of the city and the loyal disposition of the inhabitants could give to them.

The last hours at Havre were spent in making preparations for departing.

Madame, after taking her farewell of the English fleet, and saluting for the last time her country and her country's flag, entered a carriage in the midst of a brilliant escort.

De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would return to England with the admiral. But Buckingham succeeded in proving to the queen that it would be a violation of propriety to permit Madame to enter Paris unaccompanied by any Englishmen of high rank.

When it was decided that he must attend the princess, the young duke selected a court of officers and gentlemen to

form his own special retinue, so that quite an army was on its way to the capital, scattering gold and being the occasion of brilliant demonstrations in every town and village through which it passed.

The weather was beautiful, and France is a beautiful country, particularly that part of it through which the procession moved. Spring strewed the pathway of the young princess with its odorous flowers and balmy foliage. The whole of Normandy, with its rich vegetation, its blue horizons and silvery rivers, must have seemed a very paradise to the new sister of the King.

Fêtes and boundless enthusiasm hailed the progress of the dazzling company. But De Guiche and Buckingham had no eyes for such scenes; the thoughts of the one were concentrated on the task of checking any new attempt on the part of the duke; the thoughts of the duke on that of awakening in the heart of Henrietta a more vivid recollection of the country she had left and of the many happy days she had enjoyed in its bosom.

But alas! it came home to the poor duke that the memory of his beloved England was gradually fading away from her mind and the love of France was gradually taking its place.

In fact, he quickly perceived that all his devoted attentions did not evoke any gratitude, and that the grace wherewith he rode one of the most fiery steeds of Yorkshire was quite thrown away, for it was only by chance, by the merest accident, that the eyes of the fair princess ever met his.

Vainly did he essay, in order to rivet on himself one of those looks that wandered about aimlessly, or were bestowed elsewhere, to make his charger exhibit all the strength, speed, temper, and address of which it was capable; vainly did he by exciting that charger almost to madness, leap over barriers, spur wildly down declivities, risk dashing against trees or being hurled into ditches — Madame, attracted by the uproar he created, turned round her head for a moment; then, with a slight smile, turned back again to her faithful guardians De Guiche and Raoul, who were quietly riding beside her carriage.

In such cases Buckingham suffered all the tortures of jealousy. A new, ineffable, burning pain glided into his veins and laid siege to his heart; after a time, however, he became conscious of his folly, and endeavored to atone for his insane

excesses by the meekest submission. He mastered his horse, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, and forced it to champ the bit amid the crowd of courtiers near the carriage.

Occasionally Madame rewarded him with a few words, but even these words smote his ear as a reproach.

"Ah!" she would say, "I see your grace is recovering your reason."

Sometimes Raoul would say:

"Your grace is killing your horse."

And Buckingham listened to Raoul patiently, for he felt, instinctively, without having any proof of it, that Raoul curbed the feelings of De Guiche, and that, but for Raoul, some foolish step, taken either by De Guiche or himself would have led to a rupture, a scandal, perhaps to exile.

Ever since the famous conversation between the two young men before the tents of Havre, where Raoul had brought home to Buckingham the impropriety of his conduct, the duke had felt drawn toward Bragelonne, in spite of himself.

He frequently talked with him, and almost always for the purpose of speaking of his father, or of D'Artagnan, their mutual friend, about whom Buckingham was nearly as enthusiastic as Raoul himself.

Raoul was well pleased to have the conversation turn on this subject in the presence of De Wardes, who, during the entire journey, was humiliated at the superior position occupied by Bragelonne and particularly at his influence over De Guiche. De Wardes was gifted with that keen, inquisitorial penetration which is the characteristic of every malignant disposition. He had at once remarked De Guiche's sadness and the nature of his amorous aspirations in relation to the princess.

Instead of treating the subject with the reserve displayed by Raoul, instead of pointing out to his friend the necessity of respecting his duties and obligations, De Wardes resolutely smote the ever-responsive chord of youthful daring and selfish pride in the young count's nature.

Now it came to pass that while De Guiche and De Wardes were conversing, leaning against a barrier, one evening during a halt at Mantes, while Buckingham and Raoul were also conversing as they walked around, and while Manicamp was paying his court to the queen and princess, who were very familiar with him, on account of his versatile fancy, his frank disposition, and his winning manners, — it came to pass, we

repeat, that in the course of their conversation De Wardes said to the count:

"Come, now, confess that you are very ill, and that your pedagogue is doing nothing to cure you."

"I do not understand you," answered De Guiche.

"My meaning is plain enough; you are wasting away with love."

"Madness, De Wardes, madness!"

"It would be madness, I admit, if Madame were indifferent to your martyrdom; but the degree to which she notices it really compromises her, and I am dreadfully alarmed lest your pedagogue, M. de Bragelonne, should denounce you both on your arrival at Paris."

"De Wardes! De Wardes! always attacking Bragelonne!"

"Oh, a truce to this childishness," retorted the count's evil genius, in a low voice. "You know what I mean as well as I do myself. You must surely see how the expression of the princess's face softens when she speaks to you; you must understand from the tone of her voice how much she likes yours, you must feel that she is pleased with the verses you recite to her, and you will not deny that she tells you every morning she slept badly the night before."

"It is all true, De Wardes, all true; but what is the good of telling it to me?"

"Is it not important to see matters clearly?"

"Not when what you see makes you miserable."

And he turned anxiously in the direction of the princess, as if, while repelling the insinuations of De Wardes, he sought for proof of their truth in her eyes.

"Look!" cried De Wardes, "look, she is calling you, calling you, you understand? Away with you, make the best of your opportunities, your pedagogue is not here."

De Guiche could not resist the temptation; an invincible attraction drew him toward the princess.

De Wardes looked after him with a smile.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Raoul suddenly, striding over the barrier, "the pedagogue is present and has been listening to you."

De Wardes, who recognized him by his voice before he saw him, half drew his sword.

"Sheathe your sword," returned Raoul; "you know well that until our journey is finished any demonstration of this

sort is useless. Sheathe your sword, and also sheathe your tongue. Why do you distil into the heart of the man you call your friend all the venom that poisons your own? You have tried to make me dislike an honorable gentleman, my father's friend and mine; you are trying to make the count offer his love to the woman who is destined to be the bride of your master. Really, monsieur, I should regard you as a traitor and a coward if I did not, with more justice, regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," answered De Wardes, furiously, "I was not mistaken when I called you a pedagogue. The peculiar tone and style you affect is that of some Jesuit pedant, not of a gentleman. Pray discontinue this tone and style when you address me. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he acted basely toward my father."

"You lie, monsieur," said Raoul, sternly.

"What, monsieur! do you actually give me the lie?" cried De Wardes.

"Why not, if you make a false statement?"

"You give me the lie, and do not draw your sword?"

"Monsieur, I have determined not to kill you until we have safely delivered Madame into the hands of her husband."

"Kill me? Oh, your schoolmaster's cane does not kill so easily, Master Pedant."

"No," replied Raoul, coolly, "though M. d'Artagnan's sword does; not only have I his sword, but he taught me how to use it, and it is with this sword I will avenge, at the proper time, his name so foully slandered by you."

"Monsieur, take care!" exclaimed De Wardes, "if you refuse to give me immediate satisfaction I shall consider any means of revenging myself justifiable!"

"Oh!" cried Buckingham, unexpectedly appearing on the scene of action, "that threat rather smacks of assassination and does not sound well from the lips of a gentleman."

"What is that you say?" asked De Wardes, turning round.

"I say you have just uttered words that sound unpleasantly in my English ears."

"Then if what you say is true, so much the better," answered De Wardes, angrily. "Your grace is a man who will not try to slip through my fingers. Give whatever meaning to my words you like."

"I *do* give them whatever meaning I like, monsieur," re-

torted Buckingham, in the arrogant and defiant tone characteristic of him even in ordinary conversation. "M. de Bragelonne is my friend; you insult M. de Bragelonne, you must give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes glanced at Bragelonne, who, faithful to his character, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke's challenge.

"But apparently I have not insulted M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who wears a sword, does not consider himself insulted."

"At any rate, you have insulted some one, have you not?"

"Yes, I have insulted M. d'Artagnan," replied De Wardes, who had noticed that the mention of this name stung Raoul to anger.

"Then," said Buckingham, "that is another matter."

"You agree with me?" replied De Wardes; "it belongs, therefore, to the friends of M. d'Artagnan to defend him."

"I am fully of your opinion, monsieur," observed the duke, who had become quite phlegmatic. "If Bragelonne had been offended, I could not very well take his part, seeing that he is present; but as the affair concerns M. d'Artagnan —"

"You will, of course, let me deal with the matter as I like?" said De Wardes.

"No, on the contrary, I draw my sword," answered Buckingham, preparing to unsheathe the weapon, "for if M. d'Artagnan offended your father, he rendered, or tried to render, mine a great service."

De Wardes started back, bewildered.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued the duke, "is the bravest gentleman of my acquaintance. I shall be delighted to make some slight return for the many obligations he has laid me under by giving you a sword-thrust."

And at the same time Buckingham gracefully drew his sword, saluted Raoul, and stood on guard.

De Wardes advanced to cross steel.

"Stop, gentlemen!" said Raoul, also advancing and placing his sword between the combatants, "the affair is too trivial to necessitate your cutting each other's throats almost before the very eyes of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d'Artagnan, with whom he is not even acquainted."

"Oho!" cried De Wardes, grinding his teeth, but lowering the point of his sword, "you say I am not acquainted with M. d'Artagnan?"

"You are not," rejoined Raoul, coldly; "you do not know where he is, even."

"You say I do not know where he is?"

"Really that must be the case, since you are always seeking a quarrel on his account with strangers, instead of going to him directly."

De Wardes turned pale.

"Well, monsieur," continued Raoul, "I will tell you where he is. M. d'Artagnan is in Paris. He resides at his apartments in the Louvre when he is on duty, and in the Rue des Lombards when he is not. M. d'Artagnan may easily be found at either of these two places. Having, therefore, as you say, so many reasons to complain of him, you cannot be a very courageous man or else you would seek him and demand that satisfaction you are ready to require at the hands of every one except himself."

De Wardes brushed away the perspiration that covered his forehead.

"For shame, M. de Wardes!" Raoul went on, "it does not become you to be such a swashbuckler when there are edicts against duelling. Think of how the King would regard our disobedience, particularly at such a time, and the King would be right."

"More excuses," muttered De Wardes, "more pretexts!"

"Oh, that is all the veriest drivel!" returned Raoul.

"You are well aware, my dear M. de Wardes, of the Duke of Buckingham's bravery; he has already fought ten duels and is quite prepared to fight eleven. But the name he bears renders any further allusion to him unnecessary. And as to myself, you have not the slightest doubt I can fight also. I fought at Sens, Bléneau, at the Dunes before the artillery, a hundred yards in front of the line, while you, I may observe casually, were a hundred yards behind it. No doubt the reason why you concealed your valor then was because there were so many present to witness it. Here a display of your bravery would create a scandal — I suppose you want to have people talking about you, no matter how they talk. Well, you need not expect me, M. de Wardes, to aid you in your plan: I really cannot afford you that gratification."

"Your reasoning is admirable, M. de Bragelonne," returned Buckingham, sheathing his sword, "and I crave your forgiveness for allowing myself to be carried away by a rash impulse."

But De Wardes, perfectly furious, bounded forward and raised his sword threateningly over Raoul, who had barely time to put himself in a posture of defence.

"Take care, monsieur," said Bragelonne, coolly, "or you will injure one of my eyes."

"So you will not fight?" cried De Wardes.

"Not at present. But I make you this promise. Immediately on our arrival in Paris I will lead you to M. d'Artagnan, to whom you will relate all the reasons you have to complain of him. M. d'Artagnan will beg the King's permission to measure swords with you; the King will grant it, and, when you have received the sword-thrust you sought, you will be in a calmer frame of mind and will meditate on that precept of the gospel which enjoins us to forgive injuries."

"Oh!" cried De Wardes, maddened by such composure, "any one can see you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne!"

Raoul turned as white as the lace collar around his neck; such a lightning flash leaped from his eyes that De Wardes recoiled.

Buckingham was himself dazzled by it, and threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he had expected to see rush upon each other.

De Wardes had reserved this insult for the last; he grasped his sword convulsively and awaited the shock.

"You are right, monsieur," answered Raoul, regaining his self-control by a violent effort, "I know only my father's name; but I am too well acquainted with the Comte de la Fère's worth and honor to fear for a moment that there is, as you imply, a stain upon my birth. My ignorance, then, of my mother's name is a calamity, not a shame. You betray your lack both of honor and courtesy in upbraiding me with my misfortune. It matters little, however; the insult has been given, and I consider myself insulted accordingly. The affair is therefore settled. After you have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will be pleased to cross swords with me."

"Oh!" retorted De Wardes, with a bitter smile, "I admire your prudence, monsieur. You were good enough a while ago to hint that M. d'Artagnan would run me through the body. When he has done so, you offer to do the same."

"Do not be uneasy," answered Raoul, with concentrated anger. "M. d'Artagnan is well versed in the art of fencing; I will ask him to treat you as he treated your father; I will

ask him only to wound you and let me have the pleasure of killing you outright after your wound is healed, for you have a malignant disposition, M. de Wardes, and one cannot adopt too many precautions against you."

"I shall adopt certain precautions against you," replied De Wardes, "you may rest assured."

"Allow me," interposed Buckingham, "to translate the meaning of your words; the translation is contained in this little hint I am giving to M. de Bragelonne: 'M. de Bragelonne, wear a coat of mail.'"

De Wardes clinched his hands.

"Ah!" he cried, "that is the precaution you two gentlemen intend to adopt before crossing swords with me."

"So be it!" said Raoul, "since you will have it, let us make an end of the affair here and now."

And, drawing his sword, he advanced to De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Buckingham.

"Do not be alarmed," replied Raoul, "it will soon be over."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed.

De Wardes threw himself with such fury on Raoul that at the first shock of their swords it became plain to the duke that Bragelonne was only playing with his adversary.

Buckingham stepped back and looked on at the combat.

Raoul was as calm as if he were fencing with a foil instead of with a sword. He retreated a step, parried three or four thrusts aimed at him by De Wardes, and then sent the latter's sword flying over the barrier.

Then, as De Wardes stood dazed and disarmed, Raoul returned his sword to the scabbard, seized him by the collar and waistband, and hurled him, howling with fury, to join his sword on the other side of the barrier.

"We shall meet again! We shall meet again!" muttered De Wardes, rising and picking up his sword.

"Meet again!" answered Raoul, "why, I have been telling you nothing else during the last half hour!"

Then, turning to Buckingham:

"Duke, not a word about this, I beg of you. I am ashamed of having allowed myself to be driven to such an extremity, but anger got the better of me. Pardon me and forget it."

"Ah! my dear vicomte," replied the duke, pressing the strong and loyal hand of the victor, "permit me, on the con-

trary, to remember it and to look after your safety ; that man is dangerous, he will try to kill you."

"My father," returned Raoul, "lived for twenty years exposed to the assaults of a far more formidable enemy, and he survived them. I belong to a race under the special protection of Heaven, my lord duke."

"But your father had loyal friends."

"Yes, friends of a species that no longer exists," answered Raoul, with a sigh.

"Oh! do not say so, I entreat you, at a moment, too, when I am offering you my friendship."

And Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Bragelonne, who joyfully accepted the proffered alliance.

"You know well, M. de Bragelonne," added Buckingham, "that in my family we die for those we love."

"Yes, duke, I know it," answered Raoul.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT OF MADAME.

NOTHING further occurred calculated to cause any disturbance during the journey.

Giving an excuse which attracted no particular notice, De Wardes was allowed to go in advance of the others. He took Manicamp, whose equable and dreamy character served as a counterpoise to his own, along with him.

It is, perhaps, worth while remarking that persons of a boisterous and restless disposition are very fond of seeking the companionship of the gentle and timid, as if the former sought in the contrast a rest for their quarrelsome temperament, the latter a defence against their own weakness.

Buckingham and Bragelonne, having initiated De Guiche into their confraternity, did nothing but sound in concert the praises of the princess along the whole route.

Bragelonne had, however, got his two friends to promise that trios should be substituted for the solos which De Guiche and his companion had acquired a dangerous habit of singing.

This style of harmony was exceedingly pleasing to the queen

mother. It was not, perhaps, quite as agreeable to the young princess, though, who was a frightful coquette, and who having no fears as to any injury to her own voice, went to meet every peril half way. She had, indeed, one of those daring and reckless hearts that enjoy the dangers of a perilous situation, and are smitten with the sword from a sort of liking for the wound it makes.

So her glances, smiles, and toilets were an inexhaustible armory of weapons that fell in crushing showers on these three unhappy young men and made them helpless. From this armory were fired smiles, courtesies, and a thousand other delicious shafts that hit at long range the gentlemen of the escort, the citizens and officials of the towns through which she passed. Even among pages and lackeys the slaughter was universal, the devastation general. When Madame reached Paris she had left in her wake a hundred thousand lovers, about half a dozen lunatics, and two men whose cases were hopeless.

Raoul was the only person who remained cold and suspicious when the princess entered the capital of the realm. He was not blind to her charms, but there was no vacant spot in his heart that offered a mark for her arrows. Sometimes he talked with the queen during the journey on the rapturous devotion which waited on her daughter, and the mother, with the wisdom that was the fruit of so many misfortunes and deceptions, answered:

"Henrietta would have been a remarkable woman, whether born on a throne or in a cottage, for she is imaginative, fantastic, and resolute."

De Wardes and Manicamp had acted as couriers and announced the arrival of the princess. Consequently a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages from the city met the procession at Nanterre.

Monsieur, with the Chevalier de Lorraine and a part of the household of the King, was come to pay his homage to his royal bride.

At Saint-Germain the princess and her mother left their travelling-carriage, a heavy vehicle, somewhat battered by the journey, and entered a rich and elegant chariot, drawn by six horses with white and gold harness and trappings.

Seated under a silken parasol fringed with feathers in this open carriage as on a throne, the young and beautiful princess

looked radiant with the soft light reflected on her pearl-colored skin.

Monsieur, on approaching the carriage, was struck by her dazzling beauty. He gave such evident tokens of his admiration that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders disdainfully among the courtiers, while De Guiche and Buckingham felt almost broken-hearted.

After the due compliments were paid and the due ceremonies fulfilled, the whole procession moved slowly on its way again toward Paris.

While the presentations were being made, Buckingham and other English gentlemen were introduced to Monsieur.

Monsieur, however, paid them but very slight attention.

But on the way, when he saw how eager the Duke of Buckingham was to ride next to the door of the carriage, he said to the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion always:

"Who is that horseman yonder?"

"Why, he was presented to your Highness a few moments ago," answered the chevalier. "That is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Ah, very true."

"Madame's knight," he added, giving an inflection to the last word which only the envious are capable of giving to the simplest phrases.

"What do you mean by that?" asked the prince.

"I mean her knight."

"Madame owns a knight in ordinary, then?"

"By my soul, I think you can see that yourself. You surely must perceive how the two of them laugh and flirt and act as if they had stepped out of Madame Scudéri's 'Cyrus.'"

"The three of them, you mean."

"The three of them?"

"Yes, don't you see De Guiche is there also?"

"Eh? Oh, yes, I see him plain enough. All that that proves is that Madame has two cavaliers instead of one."

"You infect everything with your own poison, you viper."

"I infect nothing. Ah! Monseigneur, what a cross-grained disposition is yours! The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife, and yet you are not satisfied."

The Duc d'Orléans was always in dread of his friend's satirical humor when it had reached a certain degree of acrimony.

He changed the conversation immediately.

"The princess is pretty, I understand?" said he, as if he were talking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"Your 'yes' sounds like a 'no.' Still I fancy those dark eyes of hers are very beautiful."

"But small."

"Yes, but sparkling. She has a fine figure, though."

"It's by no means perfect, Monseigneur."

"Well, perhaps so. Still, there is something noble in her whole appearance."

"There may be. Her face is thin, however."

"I thought her teeth admirable."

"Easy enough to see them, considering what a large mouth she has. After all, Monseigneur, I was wrong, you are far handsomer than your wife."

"And do you believe I am handsomer than Buckingham? Give me your opinion."

"Oh, yes; and he knows that too. Look, he is becoming more and more attentive to Madame, from dread that you may efface from her heart the impression he has made on it."

Monsieur, in his annoyance, gave his horse the spur, but when he perceived a triumphant smile on the chevalier's face, he made the animal return to a walking pace.

"Well, I don't see any necessity for troubling my head about my cousin further. Don't I know all about her? Was n't I brought up with her, and did n't I see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"Ah, prince, she is greatly changed since then! At the period to which you allude she was not so brilliant, and, certainly, not so haughty. Do you remember the night, Monseigneur, when the King refused to dance with her, because she was ugly and ill-dressed?"

The Duc d'Orléans frowned. It was not at all flattering to be marrying a princess of whom, when young, the King had not thought much. Perhaps he would have answered had not De Guiche at that moment left the princess's carriage and ridden up to the prince. He had witnessed from a distance the conversation between the prince and the chevalier, and had been anxiously trying to guess the nature of the words interchanged between them.

Whether from perfidy or want of caution, De Lorraine did not make even the slightest effort to dissemble.

"Count," said he, "you have good taste."

"Thank you for the compliment," answered De Guiche; "but what has suggested it?"

"By our Lady! I appeal to his Highness."

"Undoubtedly he has," answered the prince. "De Guiche is well aware that I think him a perfect cavalier."

"So far so good," said the favorite. "But to return — you have been a week in Madame's company, have you not?"

"Of course," replied De Guiche, blushing in spite of himself.

"Then tell us frankly what you think of her."

"Think of her!" repeated De Guiche, bewildered.

"Yes; of her body, mind — everything."

The question dazed the count; he hesitated before answering.

"Come, now, De Guiche," cried the chevalier, laughing, "tell us frankly what you think; the prince orders you to do so."

"Yes, yes; you must be frank," added Monsieur.

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

"Oh, I know it is a delicate matter to speak about," continued Monsieur; "but you can tell me everything. What is your opinion of her?"

To hide what was passing within him, De Guiche adopted the only method of defence available for a person taken by surprise: he lied.

"Well, I cannot call Madame either good-looking or ill-looking; but on the whole I consider her rather good-looking."

"Oh! count! count!" exclaimed the chevalier; "you who went into such raptures and ecstacies over her portrait!"

De Guiche reddened to the very tips of his ears. Fortunately for him, his horse was a little restive and took a sudden plunge that enabled him to hide his agitation.

"Her portrait!" he murmured. "What portrait?" asked he, when he had rejoined them.

The chevalier had never taken his eyes off him.

"Yes, the portrait. So that miniature was not a good likeness?"

"I do not know. I have forgotten all about it. It's gone from my memory entirely."

"And yet it seemed to make a very lively impression on you."

"Possibly."

"Is she witty, at least?" inquired the prince.

"I believe so, Monseigneur."

"And is the Duke of Buckingham?"

"I don't know."

"I think he must be," rejoined the chevalier, "to judge by the way the princess is laughing. She evidently takes much pleasure in his society; and a witty woman never does that, if her companion is stupid."

"In that case I suppose he must be witty," said De Guiche, simply. Luckily Raoul noticed that something was wrong. Riding up to the chevalier, he engaged him in conversation, and thus released his friend from this dangerous inquisitor.

The public entry into Paris was very gay and brilliant. The King, in order to do honor to his brother, had commanded that preparations should be made on the most magnificent scale.

Madame and her mother alighted at the Louvre, that Louvre where, during their days of exile, they had endured neglect, misery, and starvation.

The palace, which had received the daughter of Henri IV. so inhospitably, with its bare walls, broken floors, cobweb-covered ceilings, vast, dilapidated chimney-pieces, and chilly fireplaces upon which the alms offered them by the parliament had hardly permitted a fire to glow, was now completely changed in appearance.

Everywhere were splendid hangings, and thick carpets, and polished floors, and handsome paintings in their broad golden frames; everywhere candelabra, mirrors, and sumptuous furniture; everywhere warlike-looking guards with waving plumes, and, along with all this, the antechambers and stairs thronged with courtiers and servants.

In the palace courts, where the grass at that time had grown freely, as if the thankless Mazarin wanted to show the Parisians that loneliness and disorder, as well as misery and despair, were the companions of the degraded monarchy, — in these once dumb and desolate courts, gay cavaliers were riding to and fro, their steeds striking sparks from the glistening pavements.

Carriages were crowded with young and beautiful women, who were waiting to salute as she passed, the daughter of

that daughter of France who when a widow and an exile had sometimes not been able to find wood for her fire or bread for her table, and who had been slighted by the meanest underlings in the place.

So when the English queen reëntered the Louvre her heart was more swollen by bitter and sorrowful memories than that of her daughter, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, was with the joys of her triumph.

She was well aware that this dazzling reception was given to the mother of a king restored to the possession of the second throne in Europe, while the humiliating reception once offered to her, the daughter of Henri IV., was intended to punish her for having been unfortunate.

After the royal ladies had been shown to their apartments and had taken some repose, the gentlemen also rested for a while, and then resumed their customary habits and occupations.

Raoul started to visit his father. He learned that Athos had gone to Blois. He thereupon decided to go and see D'Artagnan. But the musketeer was busy with the task of organizing a new military household for the King and could not be reached. Bragelonne then fell back on De Guiche. The count was holding conferences with his tailors and with Manicamp that monopolized all his time. He fared still worse with Buckingham. The duke was purchasing horses after horses and diamonds after diamonds. He had appropriated all the embroiderers and lapidaries and tailors in Paris. There was between him and De Guiche a duel of a more or less courteous character. To win success he was willing to lose a million, while De Guiche's allowance from the Duc de Grammont was only sixty thousand louis. So Buckingham gayly spent his millions.

When De Guiche learned this he sighed and would have torn his hair out in handfuls but for the counsel of De Wardes.

"A million!" he repeated every morning. "I am beaten! Why does n't the marshal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you 'd squander it," said Raoul.

"What concern is that of his? If I am to die of all this, I must die, and that is all there is about it."

"But why should you die?" inquired Raoul.

"I don't want an Englishman to get the better of me in elegance."

"My dear count," said Manicamp, "elegance is not a costly thing, it is only a difficult one."

"Oh, for all you say, things hard to get are very costly, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

"Upon my word," declared De Wardes, "you are in a hobble; still, there is only a difference of nine hundred and forty thousand livres to make up."

"Where am I to find them?"

"Get in debt."

"I'm there already."

"An additional reason."

Such advice as this had so much influence over De Guiche that he committed every sort of foolish extravagance, while Buckingham only incurred expenses he could easily bear.

The rumors that were spread of their prodigality brightened the faces of all the tradesmen in Paris, and from the hotel of Buckingham to that of De Guiche the tales that were told were marvellous.

Meanwhile Madame was resting, and Bragelonne was writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already sent four letters without receiving any reply, when on the very morning of the marriage ceremony, which was to be celebrated in the chapel of the Palais-Royal, Raoul's valet announced M. de Malicorne while his master was dressing.

"What does this Malicorne want with me?" said he. "Let him wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," answered the valet.

"Ah! show him in at once," cried Raoul, quickly.

Malicorne entered, resplendent as a star, and wearing a magnificent sword at his side.

After bowing gracefully:

"M. de Bragelonne," said he, "I am the bearer of a thousand compliments to you on the part of a lady."

Raoul blushed.

"A lady belonging to Blois?" he inquired.

"Yes, monsieur; Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah, thanks; I recognize you now," replied Raoul. "And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais require of me?"

Malicorne took four letters from his pocket and handed them to Raoul.

"My letters! is it possible? My letters returned to me with the seals unbroken!" he exclaimed, turning pale.

"Monsieur, since the person to whom they are addressed is no longer at Blois, they are, therefore, returned to you."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois?" cried Raoul.

"A week ago."

"Where is she?"

"She must be in Paris, monsieur."

"But how was it known that these letters were from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your hand and seal."

Raoul colored and smiled.

"This was very kind of Mademoiselle de Montalais," said he. "But, indeed, she is always kind as well as charming."

"Always, monsieur."

"Still, she could have given me some information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière's whereabouts, which it would be vain for me to seek in this vast city."

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket.

"Perhaps," said he, "this letter will tell you what you want to know."

Raoul hastily broke the seal. The letter was in the handwriting of Montalais, and these were its contents:

"*Paris, Palais-Royal, day of the nuptial benediction.*"

"What does this mean?" asked Raoul. "You must know, monsieur?"

"Yes, M. le Vicomte."

"For heaven's sake, tell me, then."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Why?"

"Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me."

Raoul stared at this singular personage, and was silent.

"At least, tell me, is what I am to find out pleasant or unpleasant?"

"You will see."

"You are frightfully reticent."

"Monsieur, I have a favor to ask of you."

"In exchange for the one you refuse to do me?"

"Precisely."

"What is it?"

"I am most anxious to see the ceremony, and I have no admission ticket, although I did everything I possibly could to procure one. Could you get me admitted?"

"Certainly."

"Do this for me, I beseech you, M. le Vicomte."

"With pleasure, monsieur; come with me."

"Monsieur, I cannot tell you how grateful I am."

"I thought you and M. de Manicamp were great friends?"

"Yes, monsieur; but this morning I was present at his toilet. I dropped a bottle of varnish, unfortunately, on his new doublet, and he rushed so savagely at me with his sword that I had to take to flight. You see I could not ask him for an admission ticket. He would have killed me."

"I can easily conceive it," answered Raoul. "Manicamp is quite capable of killing a man guilty of the crime which you had the misfortune to commit; but I will repair the mischief. Once I have fastened on my cloak, I shall be ready to serve you, both as guide and introducer."

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

MADEMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS' SURPRISE.

MADAME was married in the chapel of the Palais-Royal in presence of a limited number of courtiers selected with the greatest care. Still, although an invitation to the ceremony implied that the person so honored was a high favorite at court, Raoul, faithful to his promise, managed to introduce Malicorne, who was very eager to enjoy this curious spectacle.

After he had fulfilled his pledge, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if to serve as a foil to his magnificent costume, presented a face so downcast and miserable that the Duke of Buckingham's alone could be compared with it for paleness and utter dejection.

"Take care," whispered Raoul, when he was close to him, making ready to support him at the moment when the archbishop was blessing the bride and bridegroom.

In fact, the Prince de Condé was gazing curiously at these two statues of despair, standing like caryatides at either end of the nave.

The count grew a little calmer.

When the ceremony was over, the King and the two queens

passed into the grand hall in order that Madame and her suite might be presented to them.

It was noticed that the King appeared to be marvellously impressed by Madame's beauty, and was lavish of compliments that were evidently sincere.

It was also noticed that his mother, after gazing pensively at Buckingham, had turned to Madame de Motteville, remarking, to all appearance: "Do you not think he is like his father?"

And finally it was noticed that Monsieur's eyes rested upon everybody, and that he did not look at all pleased.

After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur requested the King to allow him to present to him as well as to Madame the members of his new household.

"Can you tell me," whispered M. le Prince to Raoul, "whether the person intrusted with the formation of the household is a person of taste, and whether we are likely to see some pretty faces?"

"I have not the slightest knowledge on the subject, monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"Oh! now, you need not feign ignorance."

"What do you mean by that, monseigneur?"

"You are the friend of De Guiche, and De Guiche is one of the friends of the prince."

"True, I am, monseigneur; but as it was a matter in which I took no interest, I have not asked him about it, and De Guiche has not volunteered me any information."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I have been in Manicamp's company at Havre and on the road, but I felt no more desire to question him than to question De Guiche. Besides, as M. de Manicamp is a person of secondary importance, what can he know about it?"

"There 's where you 're mistaken. My dear viscount, it is the persons of secondary importance who on such occasions have all the influence, and the proof of it is that all the arrangements have been really made by Manicamp: Manicamp told De Guiche what to do, and De Guiche told Monsieur what to do."

"That may be, monseigneur," said Raoul, "but it is all news to me, I assure your Highness."

"Of course I believe you, though it sounds incredible. How-

ever, we shall not have long to wait. Here comes the flying squadron, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Odds-fish! they *have* pretty faces, then."

A bevy of young damsels was advancing into the hall, led by Madame de Navailles, and it must be said to Manicamp's honor that if he had as much to do with their selection as Condé suggested, they presented a spectacle calculated to enchant every one who, like M. le Prince, was an admirer of beauty. A blonde young girl, twenty or twenty-one, and who shot forth dazzling flames whenever she opened her great blue eyes, marched at their head and was the first to be presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said the venerable Madame de Navailles to Monsieur.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," repeated Monsieur, with a bow to Madame.

"Ah! ah! a rather pleasing young person," said Condé to Raoul, "and —"

"No doubt, she is pretty; but she looks rather imperious."

"Pshaw! we know what those airs amount to; she 'll be tame enough in three months. But look, the next one is a regular beauty."

"Stay! I think she is a beauty of my acquaintance, too," answered Raoul.

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navaille.

Name and surname were scrupulously repeated by Monsieur.

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the door of entry.

"What is the matter?" inquired the prince. "Was it Mademoiselle de Montalais who drove you to utter that emphatic *Grand Dieu?*"

"No, monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Then it must be that fascinating blonde who is coming after her. What lovely eyes, *ma foi!* A little thin, but she has charms enough to make up for it."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Madame Navaille.

When that name reëchoed in the depths of Raoul's heart a cloud seemed to mount from his breast and obscure his eyes. He no longer saw or heard, and M. le Prince, finding that he hardly answered his bantering jests, made his way toward the beautiful young girls whose graces he had at the first glance recognized.

"Louise here! Louise maid of honor to Madame!" Raoul murmured.

And his eyes, which failed to convince his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais.

The latter had already laid aside her assumed timidity, was eyeing the persons around her with the utmost self-confidence, and, having at last seen Raoul, was highly amused at the stupefaction caused in the poor lover by her own and her friend's presence.

Those malicious and mocking eyes of hers, which Raoul tried to avoid and yet could not help meeting with a questioning look, were a source of the most agonizing torture to him.

As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or from some other cause unguessed by Raoul, she kept her eyes constantly lowered, and frightened, dazzled, her breath coming in short gasps, she withdrew from notice as much as she could, in spite of the many nudges which Montalais gave her with her elbow.

It was all an enigma, and our unfortunate hero would have given a good deal to know the key to it.

But there was no one there to communicate it, not even Malicorne, who, feeling a little embarrassed in the company of so many gentlemen, and rather scared by Aure's mocking glances, had described a circle and gradually retreated until he found himself a few paces from M. le Prince and the maids of honor. He was, indeed, within reach of the voice of Mademoiselle de Montalais, that planet around which he was compelled to gravitate as a humble satellite.

When Raoul had regained his composure, he fancied he recognized voices on his left that were familiar to him. He was not deceived. De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine were conversing together, though they were conversing in such low tones that only their breathing could be heard in this immense hall.

To be able to make one's self understood in this style without bending down or moving a muscle was one of those sublime accomplishments which it took newcomers a long time to acquire. The persons who, after much study and many tedious efforts, were able to attain to such immobility, looked like a group of statues when talking together.

And in fact, at the grand receptions of the King and the two queens, while their Majesties were speaking and fancying

that their auditors were listening in reverent silence, many of these noiseless colloquies were held all the time, and adulation of the speakers' rulers was not always the dominant note in them, either.

Now Raoul was a perfect master of this courtly art, and could often guess the meaning of the words uttered by the mere movements of the lips.

"Who is this Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and who is this La Vallière? Are all the provincial damsels in France coming down on us?"

"I know Montalais," said the chevalier. "Rather a good sort; she'll amuse the court. La Vallière is a charming girl, though she limps."

"Pooh! pooh!" retorted De Wardes.

"Don't pooh-pooh, De Wardes; there are some very ingenious and characteristic sayings in Latin anent girls who limp."

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" said De Guiche, looking uneasily at Raoul, "pray do not make so free with people's names."

But the count had no reason to feel uneasy — at least, apparently. Raoul's countenance was calm and indifferent, although he had not lost a single word that had been said. It seemed as if he were keeping a register of the insults and provocations of the two speakers with the view of settling the account when the proper time came.

De Wardes doubtless guessed at what he was thinking and continued:

"Who are the lovers of these ladies?"

"Of Montalais?" asked the chevalier.

"Yes; of Montalais, first."

"Oh, you, I; anybody that likes."

"And of the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Take care, gentlemen," interposed De Guiche, to prevent De Wardes from replying, "Madame will hear us."

Raoul was in tortures, and tore his lace ruffles in his rage.

But the malignant virulence of which these poor women were made the victims had the effect of making him take a serious resolution.

"Louise," said he to himself, "cannot have come here but

with an honorable purpose and under honorable protection; but I must learn her purpose and find out who is her protector."

And in imitation of Malicorne, he too made his way toward the maids of honor.

The presentation soon came to an end. The King, who still continued to admire Madame, passed out with the two queens.

The chevalier resumed his position beside Monsieur and, as he walked along with him, distilled into his ear some drops of that poison which he had collected during the last hour, all the time glancing at the new arrivals in court, and disappointed because the faces of some of them looked happy.

The King on leaving had drawn a goodly number of the courtiers in his train, but those who made a profession of independence or gallantry stayed behind, and began paying their court to the ladies.

The Prince de Condé congratulated Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente on her appearence. Buckingham tried to ingratiate himself with Madame de Chalais and Madame de Lafayette, whom Madame had already commenced to distinguish by her love and favor. As for the Comte de Guiche, he had parted company with Monsieur when the latter joined Madame, and was now holding a spirited conversation with his sister, Madame de Valentinois, and with Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.

Amid all these political or amorous interests, Malicorne's sole desire was to have a conference with Montalais; but she much preferred chatting with Raoul, were it only to enjoy his surprise and the questions it led to.

Raoul, however, soon went to Mademoiselle de la Vallière and saluted her with the profoundest respect.

Louise blushed and stammered; which seeing, Montalais came to her aid.

"Well, M. le Comte," said she, "so here we are at last!"

"You are here, anyway," answered Raoul, smiling, "and it's just about that fact that I should like to have a little explanation."

Malicorne drew near, wearing his most charming smile.

"Go away, M. Malicorne," said Montalais; "you are really very indiscreet."

Malicorne pursed up his lips, and retreated a few steps without uttering a single word. But his face lost its frank expression and became cynical.

"You want an explanation, M. de Bragelonne, do you?" inquired Montalais.

"Certainly I do. The circumstances demand it, I should think. Mademoiselle de la Vallière maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should she not be a maid of honor as well as I?" asked Montalais.

"Accept my congratulations, ladies," he answered, perceiving that he was not likely to get a direct answer.

"You say that in such a tone that I am afraid you hardly intend it as a compliment, M. le Vicomte."

"What can you mean?"

"I appeal to Louise."

"Perhaps M. de Bragelonne considers the place above my station," said Louise, stammering.

"Oh! no, no! mademoiselle," replied Raoul, eagerly; "you are well aware that such is not my opinion. If, instead of being maid of honor to a princess, you were a princess yourself, it could not surprise me. My surprise arises from the fact that I heard of it only to-day, and then by accident."

"Ah, yes, that is true," answered Montalais, with her usual giddiness. "You know nothing about the matter, and naturally. Louise, M. de Bragelonne wrote four letters to you; but you were gone and your mother was left behind at Blois. You would n't like if these letters fell into her hands; so I intercepted them and sent them back to Raoul. He believed you, therefore, to be in Blois when you were all the time in Paris and had risen a step in rank besides, though he knew nothing about that, either."

"What!" cried La Vallière, "you did not inform M. de Bragelonne of it, when I requested you?"

"Why should I? Supply him with an opportunity for his austere homilies and grave sermons, and let him undo what we had such trouble in doing? Ah, not if I know myself!"

"Am I such very a severe personage, then?" inquired Raoul.

"Besides," continued Montalais, "it suited me admirably. I was starting for Paris, you were away, Louise was weeping distractedly, a circumstance you may interpret as you like. I requested my protector, the gentleman who got me my brevet, to get one for Louise also. He did so. Louise set out before me to have the proper costumes made. I remained behind,

for I had mine already. When I sent your letters back I added a few words to them which promised you a surprise. Well, you *are* surprised, I fancy, my dear monsieur. My surprise ought to do you good, and there 's nothing more to be said about it. Come, M. Malicorne, it 's time to leave these young people together; they have a multitude of things to say to each other; give me your arm; I hope you are conscious of the great honor I am doing you, M. Malicorne?"

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," replied Raoul, in tones whose seriousness contrasted with the levity of the flighty young lady; "might I know the name of this protector; for, while there is every reason why you may have such influential protection —" and Raoul bowed, "there is no reason why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should have such protection," he finished.

"Goodness gracious! M. de Bragelonne," said Louise, simply, "there is no occasion for making a mystery about it, and I do not see why I should not tell you about it myself. My protector is M. Malicorne."

Raoul was for the moment dumfounded, wondering if these young girls were laughing at him. He turned round to question Malicorne. But Malicorne had been carried away by Montalais and was already at a distance.

Mademoiselle de la Vallière was preparing to follow her friend; Raoul held her back with gentle authority.

"Just a word with you, I beg, Louise," said he.

"But, Monsieur Raoul," said she, "we are alone; every one has gone. They are likely to be anxious about me and to be sending for me."

"You need not be afraid," said the young man, smiling. "We are neither of us so very important that our absence is likely to be remarked."

"But my duties, monsieur?"

"Do not be uneasy, mademoiselle. I know the ways of the court. You will not be on duty until to-morrow. As I want only five minutes of your time, then, you can surely, during that time, give me the information I have the honor to request of you."

"How grave you are, Monsieur Raoul!" said Louise, troubled.

"The circumstances are grave, mademoiselle. Will you listen to me?"

"Yes, monsieur; but I wish to repeat that we are quite alone."

"You are right," said Raoul.

And taking her hand he led her into the apartment next the reception hall, the windows of which looked out upon the square.

There was a crowd at the central window, for it had a balcony from which all the slow and formal preparations for the departure could be seen.

Raoul opened one of the side windows, and being alone with Mademoiselle de la Vallière in the recess, he said:

"Louise, you know I have loved you since we were children together and that you have been the confidant of all my sorrows, the depository of all my hopes."

"Yes," she whispered, "yes, M. Raoul, I know that."

"You have always shown me, on your part, the same confidence, the same affection. Why have you, on this occasion, not been my friend, and why have you distrusted me?"

La Vallière did not answer.

"I thought you loved me," continued Raoul, whose voice trembled more and more; "I thought you had consented to all the plans we made together for our mutual happiness, when we two used to ramble along the alleys of Cour-Cheverny and the avenue of poplars that leads to Blois. You do not answer, Louise?"

He paused.

"Can it be possible," he asked, gasping for breath, "that you no longer love me?"

"I have not said so," answered Louise, in a low voice.

"Oh! be frank with me, I implore you. I have centred all my hopes in this life in you. I have chosen you for your gentle, simple tastes. Do not allow yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where purity turns to corruption and youth grows stale and withered. Louise, shut your ears to the words that will be spoken to you, shut your eyes to the examples they would else gaze on, shut your lips that they may not breathe the tainted air around you. But will you tell me, without falsehood or disguise, whether I am to believe Mademoiselle de Montalais? Did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed, and hid her face in her hands.

"Yes, yes," cried Raoul, excitedly, "that was why you

came was it not? Oh! I love you as I never loved before! Oh, Louise, thanks, thanks for your great love for me! I must now take measures to place you beyond all insult, to save you from every peril. Louise, a maid of honor at the court of a young princess, in an age of loose morals and fickle loves, is exposed to terrible danger, and is without defence. Such a position does not befit you. To be respected, you must be married."

"Married?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

"There is my hand, Louise; place yours within it."

"But your father?"

"My father has left me free to do as I like."

"Still—"

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will go seek my father."

"Oh! M. Raoul, wait, reflect."

"Wait? impossible. Reflect? To reflect in regard to a matter that so closely concerns you would be to insult you. Your hand, my darling; I am my own master, and I can promise you that my father will say 'yes.' Your hand, Louise; do not keep me waiting thus; answer me with a word, just one word only. If not, I shall begin to think that all that was required to transform your nature entirely was the chance of entering a court, a breath of royal favor, the smile of a queen, the glance of a king."

When Raoul uttered the last word, La Vallière turned as pale as death; her paleness may have been caused by the feverish excitement by which she saw the young man was possessed. With a movement swift as thought she placed both her hands in his.

Then she fled without uttering a word or giving a glance behind her. Every fibre in Raoul's body thrilled at the contact of her hand. He received her pledge as if it were a solemn oath wrested from virginal timidity and love.

CHAPTER XC.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

Raoul had passed out of the Palais-Royal full of ideas that admitted of no delay in their execution. He mounted on horseback even in the court-yard, and immediately started on the road to Blois, leaving behind him the rest of the nuptial festivities, which were to amuse the courtiers and drive Buckingham and De Guiche to despair.

Raoul lost no time, and arrived in Blois at the end of eighteen hours. He had sorted and arranged his very best arguments on the way. Fever is itself a kind of argument, and he was in a fever.

Athos was in his study, adding some pages to his memoirs, when Grimaud ushered in Raoul. A single glance told the clear-sighted gentleman that there was something unusual in the appearance of his son.

"You have apparently visited me on an important matter," he said, motioning Raoul to a chair, after he had embraced him.

"Yes, monsieur," answered Raoul, "and I must beg of you to grant me that kindly attention which I have never failed to receive at your hands."

"Speak, Raoul."

"Monsieur, I shall come to the point without any preamble, for any other course would not be respectful toward you: Mademoiselle de la Vallière is at Paris as maid of honor to Madame. I have thoroughly examined my heart, and it tells me I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière beyond everything, and I cannot leave her in a position where her reputation or her virtue may be endangered. I wish, therefore, to marry her, monsieur, and I have come to ask your consent to that marriage."

Athos observed the most absolute silence and reserve during this communication.

Raoul had begun his discourse with an assumption of calmness, but he gave evident signs of the most intense emotion before he had finished.

Athos fixed on him a penetrating look that had something of sadness in it.

"So you have given the subject serious reflection?" said he.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I seem to remember that I have already expressed my opinion with regard to this alliance."

"I know it, monsieur," replied Raoul, in a very low voice; "but you added that if I persisted—"

"And you persist?"

Bragelonne stammered out a "yes" that was almost unintelligible.

"Your passion must be, indeed, very strong," observed Athos, quietly, "since, in spite of my repugnance for this union, you still desire it."

Raoul passed a trembling hand over his forehead and brushed away the sweat that covered it.

Athos looked at him and his heart was moved with pity. He rose.

"It is well," said he, "my own feelings do not matter, since yours are in question. You have a request to make, I am ready to grant it. Come, what is it you wish?"

"Your forbearance and indulgence, monsieur, above all," answered Raoul, taking his hand.

"You are quite mistaken as to my sentiments in your regard, Raoul. The feeling I have in my heart for you is stronger than indulgence," replied the count.

Raoul kissed the hand he held as ardently as might have done the most passionate lover.

"You see, Raoul, I am ready to do what you wish. What am I to sign?"

"Oh, nothing, monsieur, nothing. Still, perhaps, you would be pleased to write to the King, asking the permission of his Majesty, to whom I belong, for me to wed Mademosielle de la Vallière."

"That is a proper idea of yours, Raoul. In fact, the King comes after, or, rather, before me. The King is your master. It is loyal of you to submit to this double trial."

"Oh, monsieur!"

"I will comply with your request at once, Raoul."

The count went to the window, and leaning out, cried:

"Grimaud!"

Grimaud poked his head out of an arbor covered with jasmine.

"My horses," said the count.

"What does this order signify?" asked Raoul.

"That we start in two hours."

"For what place?"

"For Paris."

"For Paris! You are going to Paris?"

"Is not the King in Paris?"

"Of course."

"Well, why should we not go there? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

"But, monsieur," cried Raoul, frightened at such fatherly condescension, "I did not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience, and a simple letter —"

"Raoul, I am not such an important person as you seem to imagine. It is not the proper thing for a mere private gentleman like me to write to his King. It is my wish and duty to speak to his Majesty, and I intend doing so. We'll start out together, Raoul."

"Oh, how kind you are!"

"Is his Majesty well disposed in your favor?"

"I have the best reason for thinking so."

"Has he told you so?"

"Yes, with his own lips."

"On what occasion?"

"I think M. d'Artagnan had spoken to him of me before; and in connection with an incident on the Place de Grève, where I had the good fortune to draw my sword in the King's service. I have, therefore, good reason to believe, without any vanity, that the King is favorably disposed in my regard."

"So much the better."

"But I beseech you, monsieur, not to maintain the grave and stern demeanor you are showing toward me. Do not make me regret that I have yielded to a feeling that was too strong for me."

"This is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary. You asked my formal consent; I have given it; there is nothing more to be said. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew that, after such an expression of the count's will, there was no further room for discussion. He bent his head and followed his father into the garden.

Athos pointed out leisurely the graftings, cuttings, and rows of trees he was planting.

This coolness became more and more disconcerting to Raoul. The love that filled his heart seemed to him so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. Why was it that the heart of Athos was closed to its influence?

So, collecting all his courage, he suddenly exclaimed:

"Monsieur, you must have some reason unknown to me for disapproving of Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She is so good and sweet and pure that surely a mind like yours, impregnated with such supreme wisdom, must appreciate her merits. In the name of Heaven! has there been any hidden enmity between your family and hers, any hereditary hatred?"

"Look, Raoul, at this beautiful bed of lilies," replied Athos. "See how the shade and the moisture suit it, particularly the shade of that sycamore which allows the warmth, but not the blazing heat, of the sun to filter through its branches."

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, then, feeling the blood surge to his temples:

"Monsieur," said he, bravely, "I entreat you to explain yourself. You cannot forget that your son is a man."

"Well," answered Athos, drawing himself up sternly, "prove that you are a man, for you have not proved that you are a son. I begged you to wait for the time when you could form an illustrious alliance; I could have found you a wife of the very highest station among the wealthy nobles. I wished you to shine with the twofold splendor given by rank and fortune. As to nobility of race, you had that already."

"Monsieur," cried Raoul, giving way to a sudden impulse, "I was upbraided the other day with not knowing who my mother was."

Athos turned pale; then bending his brows with the awful frown of some ancient god:

"I desire to know how you answered the insulter," he said, majestically.

"Oh! pardon me, pardon me!" murmured the young man, at once losing the lofty tone he had assumed.

"What answer did you give him?" cried Athos, stamping the ground.

"Monsieur, I drew my sword; he put himself on guard; I struck his sword over a palisade, and hurled him over it to join his sword."

"And why did you not kill him?"

"His Majesty has forbidden duelling, monsieur, and I was at that moment his Majesty's ambassador."

"It is well," rejoined Athos; "but I have now a stronger reason than ever for speaking to the King."

"What are you going to ask him for, monsieur?"

"Permission to draw my sword against the man who has thus insulted us."

"Monsieur, if I have not acted as I ought to have acted, forgive me, I beseech you."

"Have I reproached you, Raoul?"

"But then this permission you are about to request of the King —"

"Raoul, I shall also beg his Majesty to sign your marriage contract."

"Monsieur —"

"But on one condition."

"Oh! monsieur, do not talk of conditions where I am concerned. You have only to order, and I will obey."

"On condition," continued Athos, "that you tell me the name of the man who has thus spoken of — your mother."

"But, monsieur, why should you want to know his name? The insult was offered to me, and, once his Majesty's permission is obtained, it belongs to me to resent it."

"His name, monsieur."

"I cannot endure the thought of you exposing yourself —"

"Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name."

"You insist?"

"I command."

"The Vicomte de Wardes."

"Ah!" said Athos, coldly, "I know him. But our horses are ready, monsieur. In place of starting in two hours, we 'll start at once. Mount, monsieur, mount!"

CHAPTER XCI.

MONSIEUR IS JEALOUS OF BUCKINGHAM.

While the Comte de la Fère and Raoul were on their way to Paris, the Palais-Royal was the theatre of a scene which Molière would have called excellent comedy.

Monsieur had been married just four days. After a hasty breakfast, he rose and passed into one of the antechambers, with pursed-up lips and frowning brow.

The repast had not been very gay. Madame had ordered her breakfast to be served in her own apartments. Monsieur had, therefore, breakfasted with a small party of his friends. In fact, the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only persons present at this breakfast, which had lasted three-quarters of an hour in complete silence.

Manicamp, who was not so intimate with his royal Highness as the chevalier, made vain efforts to read in the prince's eyes the cause of his moroseness.

The Chevalier de Lorraine, having no need to set about guessing, since he knew everything, went on eating with the extraordinary appetite which he always possessed when he saw other people in trouble; he was enjoying the embarrassment of Manicamp as well as the vexation of Monsieur.

The prince was feverishly impatient to rise from table; so his favorite protracted the meal to keep him fastened to his chair. Sometimes the prince used to regret that he had allowed the chevalier to gain such an ascendency over him as to permit himself to disregard all the laws of etiquette with impunity. He was in this mental condition on the present occasion; but he feared the chevalier almost as much as he liked him, and kept his anger within his own breast.

At times Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, at times fixed them on the slices of pâté the chevalier was attacking, and finally, not daring to give vent to his fury in any other way, he indulged in pantomimic gesticulations for which Harlequin might have envied him.

At last he could restrain himself no longer. At dessert he rose up angrily, as we have said, and left the chevalier to finish his breakfast in what manner he liked.

Seeing Monsieur rise, Manicamp started up also, napkin in hand.

Monsieur did not walk into the antechamber, he ran, and finding an usher, he gave him an order in a low voice. Then turning back, but avoiding passing through the dining-room, he crossed several apartments, intending to visit the queen mother in her oratory, where she spent most of her time.

This occurred at about ten in the forenoon.

Anne of Austria was writing when he entered. The queen mother was very fond of him, for he was very sweet-tempered and very handsome. And indeed Monsieur was far more tender — perhaps effeminate would be the better word — than the King.

He had won his mother's affections by those little, delicate, sympathetic attentions which have such a value for women. Anne of Austria, who was disappointed in not having a daughter, found in her son the pretty little caressing ways of a child of twelve.

Monsieur spent the time he passed with his mother in admiring her arms or giving her hints on the composition of her cosmetics and essences, about which she was very particular. Then he would kiss her eyes and hands in a delightfully childish manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer or some new fashion to recommend to her.

It was the King, or rather royalty, that Anne of Austria loved in her eldest son. Louis XIV. was in her eyes the representative of legitimacy by right divine, and to the King she was the queen mother; to Philippe she was simply a mother.

And Philippe had learned that of all places of refuge the bosom of a mother is the sweetest and safest.

So during his childhood he had often fled there for refuge when stormy quarrels arose between his brother and him; often, after cuffing his sovereign, — a crime of high treason on his part, — and after terrific combats in which fists and nails played a prominent part, and in which the King and his rebel subject engaged, with nothing on them but their shirts, and with their valet Laporte as umpire, in order to decide who was to have possession of a disputed bed, Philippe, always the victor, but always frightened at his victory, would run to his mother to ask for help, or at least for her to prevail on Louis XIV. to forgive him, which forgiveness was only obtained with difficulty and after a long interval had elapsed.

By her conciliatory intervention on such occasions, Anne of Austria always managed to settle the differences between her sons, and at the same time to share all their secrets.

The King, whose jealousy was somewhat aroused by his mother's preference for Philippe, showed her, for that very reason, more submission and affection than it was in his nature to show to anybody.

Anne of Austria adopted the same policy in respect to the young queen that she had practised in respect to her sons.

The result was that she reigned almost despotically over the royal household, and now she was arranging all her batteries in order to be able to rule over the household of her second son with the same absolute power.

Anne of Austria was almost pleased when she saw one of her sons enter her apartment with dejected mien, pale cheeks, and red eyes; she was thereby afforded an opportunity of giving assistance to the weaker or more mutinous party.

She was writing, as we have stated, when Monsieur entered her oratory; his cheeks were not pale, nor were his eyes red, but he looked anxious and worried for all that.

He kissed his mother's arm in an absent-minded kind of way, and sat down before she had given him permission.

The laws of etiquette were observed so strictly at Anne of Austria's court that this breach of propriety was in itself a sign of aberration, especially in the case of Philippe, who was always extravagant in an outward show of reverence for his mother. If he failed in this respect at present, it was because there must be a very serious reason for it.

"What ails you, Philippe?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning to her son.

"Ah! Madame, many things ail me," murmured the prince, dismally.

"You certainly look like a person who has a good deal on his mind," answered Anne, laying her pen on the inkstand.

Philippe frowned, but did not answer.

"But though you may have a good deal on your mind," she continued, "there must be some particular thing which depresses you more than the others."

"Yes, Madame, there is one thing that depresses me more than all the rest."

"What is it?"

Philippe opened his mouth as if to afford an exit for all the troubles which filled his mind and were only waiting for some outlet to rush forth at once. But suddenly he became silent, and all his woes were summed up and exhaled in a sigh.

"Come, come, Philippe, show a little firmness," said the queen mother. "When any one complains of a thing, it almost always happens that the thing complained of turns out to be a person. Is not that your case?"

"Perhaps."

"Whom do you want to speak to me about? Come, pluck up your courage."

"I hesitate, Madame, because the matter is very delicate."

"Good heavens!"

"Undoubtedly it is. When a woman is concerned —"

"Ah! you want to speak to me of Madame?" asked Anne of Austria, with eager curiosity.

"Of Madame?"

"Yes, of your wife, I suppose."

"Well, yes."

"Then you can talk to me without feeling in the slightest degree embarrassed, my son. I am your mother, and Madame is only a stranger in my eyes. Still, as she is my daughter-in-law, anything you have to tell me will have the keenest interest for me, were it only for your own sake."

"And now, Madame," said Philippe, "would you have the goodness to tell me whether you have not noticed something yourself?"

"Noticed something, Philippe? You are frightfully vague! What do you mean by this *something*?"

"Madame is pretty, is she not?"

"Decidedly."

"Still, she is not a beauty."

"No, but as she grows she is sure to become singularly beautiful. You have seen what changes a few years have effected in her appearance. Well, she is only sixteen, and her beauty will improve more and more with every year. At fifteen I myself was very thin. Even as she is, she is very pretty."

"And, consequently, is much admired."

"Undoubtedly she would have been that if born in a lower station, and she is a princess."

"She has been well brought up, has she not, Madame?"

"Madame Henrietta, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold and haughty, but a woman actuated by the noblest sentiments. The education of the young princess may have been neglected, but I have no doubt her principles are good. At least, that was the opinion I formed of her during her stay in France. Since her return to England I cannot, of course, say what may have happened."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, I mean only that some heads are rather light and easily turned by prosperity."

"You have expressed my meaning exactly, Madame; I think the princess is rather light-headed."

"But you must not exaggerate, Philippe. She is clever, and has a tinge of that coquetry which is so natural in a young woman. However, in persons of her station, such a small defect is really advantageous to a court. A princess who is just a little bit coquettish generally has a brilliant court. A smile from her gives birth to wit, luxury, and even courage everywhere. The nobles will fight more valiantly for a prince whose wife is beautiful."

"Accept my most profound thanks, Madame," said Philippe, ironically and angrily. "Still, the pictures you draw are rather alarming, mother."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with feigned innocence.

"You are aware, Madame," answered Philippe, dolefully, "how much I disliked the idea of getting married?"

"Oh, now you are beginning to frighten me really. You have, then, a serious ground of complaint against Madame?"

"I do not say a serious one, exactly."

"Then, pray, do not look so lugubrious. Be on your guard. If any one were to see you now, he would suspect you were a very unfortunate husband."

"In fact," replied the prince, "I am not a contented husband, and I don't care who knows it, either."

"Philippe! Philippe!"

"*Ma foi!* I must tell you plainly I do not understand the sort of life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife, in good truth, does not seem to belong to me. She is always escaping from me. In the morning it is visits, letters, toilets; in the evening, balls and concerts."

"Why, you are jealous, Philippe!"

"I, jealous? God forbid! I leave the part of the jealous husband to be played by others. But I am annoyed."

"Philippe, your reproaches are based on things that are perfectly innocent. If you have no graver charge to bring against your wife than these — still, a woman may be perfectly innocent, and yet give grounds for uneasiness. Certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown which expose young women to remark and often lash the least jealous husbands into fury."

"Ah! we have come to the point at last, though not without some trouble. Visitors, preferences — good! We have been only beating about the bush for the last hour, now we approach the real question."

"This is growing serious. Are your grievances against Madame caused, then, by the circumstances to which I have alluded?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Do you really mean to tell me that your wife, married to you only four days ago, already prefers the society of some other man to yours? Take care, Philippe; you exaggerate your troubles. Those who prove too much prove nothing."

The prince, who was intimidated by his mother's grave demeanor, tried to answer, but could only stammer out a few unintelligible words.

"Ah, you draw back — I am glad of it; it shows you recognize your mistake."

"No," cried Philippe, "no! I do not draw back, and I am going to show you I do not. You spoke of visitors and preferences? Well, listen."

Anne of Austria made ready to listen with that love of gossip which the best woman and the best mother, even when a queen, is fond of, especially when it concerns the petty squabbles of a household.

"Will you please tell me one thing, Madame?"

"What is it?"

"Why does my wife continue to keep an English court?"

And Philippe, crossing his arms, looked full in his mother's face, as if he were convinced that she could find nothing to answer to that grievance.

"Why, it is very simple," returned Anne of Austria. "The English are her countrymen; they have expended a great deal

of money in order to accompany her to France, and it would certainly be impolite, not to say impolitic, to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not recoiled before any sacrifice, before any trial of their devotion."

"Ah! mother, talk of sacrifice, indeed! What sacrifice must it be to leave an ugly country and come to a beautiful one, where a greater display can be made with a single crown than elsewhere with four! And what a trial of devotion must it be to travel a hundred leagues in order to be near the woman with whom you are in love!"

"In love, Philippe? Are you thinking of what you are saying?"

"I should think I am!"

"And who is in love with Madame?"

"The handsome Duke of Buckingham. I suppose you'll undertake his defence, too?"

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of Buckingham recalled such sweet and sad memories.

"The Duke of Buckingham?" she murmured.

"Yes, one of those feather-bed soldiers, as my grandfather, Henri IV., used to call them."

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"Ah! it has come to this now! My own mother is taking the part of my wife's lover against me!" cried the prince, exasperated to such a degree that, with his frail organization, he was affected almost to tears.

"My son! my son!" cried Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you. Your wife has no lover, and, if she had one, it would not be Buckingham. The men of his race are, as I said before, brave and loyal, and they regard the rights of hospitality as sacred."

"Oh, Madame," said Philippe, "the duke is an Englishman. Have the English always shown such profound respect for the property of French princes?"

Anne blushed a second time, and turned aside under pretence of taking up her pen from the desk, but in reality to hide her blushes from her son's eyes.

"In good truth, Philippe," said she, "you are quite skilful in finding the very words that annoy me. Your anger blinds you as much as it frightens me. Reflect, try to see things in the proper light."

"Madame, I do not need to reflect, and I see what I see plainly enough."

"And what do you see?"

"I see that Buckingham never leaves my wife; I see that he dares to make her presents and that she dares to receive them. Yesterday she spoke of violet sachets. Our French perfumers, as you well know, Madame, are unacquainted with that scent. Well, it seems the duke had a sachet about him, and now my wife has it."

"Really, you build pyramids on needle-points," replied Anne of Austria. "What harm is there in a countryman of hers presenting the princess with a receipt for a new perfume? These strange ideas of yours remind me of many painful experiences I had with your father."

"Buckingham's father was no doubt more reserved and respectful than his son," said Philippe, thoughtlessly, unconscious that he was inflicting a bitter pang on his mother's heart.

The queen turned pale and pressed her hand convulsively to her breast; but she regained her self-control quickly.

"To bring things to a conclusion," she said, "you must have had some object or other in coming hither."

"I came with the intention of making an energetic protest and assuring you that I shall not endure anything at Buckingham's hands."

"And what do you intend doing?"

"Complaining to the King."

"I wonder what kind of an answer the King is likely to give you."

"Well," returned Monsieur, with an expression of fierce determination that contrasted oddly with the usual gentleness of his physiognomy, "if the King does not do me justice, I 'll take the affair into my own hands."

"What do you mean?" asked Anne of Austria, somewhat alarmed.

"I mean that Buckingham must leave the queen; I mean that he must leave France, and I will see to it that my orders are transmitted to him."

"You shall not do any such thing, Philippe," said the queen. "If you did, if you violated the laws of hospitality to such a degree as that, I would call down upon your head the utmost severity of the King."

"You threaten me, mother!" cried Philippe, in tears, "you threaten me at the very time I am seeking your help!"

"No, I am not threatening you, I am throwing an obstacle in the way of your foolish rage. I tell you that if you adopt toward the Duke of Buckingham or any other Englishman a rigorous measure — even a discourteous measure — you embroil England and France and bring about the greatest calamities. What! you are a prince, the brother of the King of France, and you cannot disregard an insult, though a real one, in presence of a political necessity!"

Philippe was startled.

"Moreover," continued the queen, "this insult is neither real nor possible, but is only the figment of your own jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"And I say to you that, whatever you know, you must have patience."

"I am not patient, Madame."

The queen rose up stiffly, and assumed her most ceremonious and icy demeanor.

"Tell me what you have decided on," said she.

"I have decided on nothing, I have only expressed a wish. If Buckingham does not stay away of his own accord, I shall forbid him my house."

"That is a question we shall refer to the King," answered Anne of Austria, her bosom heaving, her voice trembling.

"But, Madame," cried Philippe, striking one hand against the other, "be my mother and not my queen, for I am speaking to you as a son. The difficulty between me and the Duke of Buckingham can be settled in a five minutes' conversation."

"And such a conversation is just the one I forbid," said the queen, with all her old imperiousness; "it would be unworthy of you, Monsieur."

"Very well, I shall not appear in the matter myself, but content myself with intimating my wishes to Madame."

"Ah!" said Anne of Austria, with the sadness born of her memories, "do not tyrannize over your wife, my son. Do not be too imperative with her. Do not think that, when you have compelled her to be silent, you have convinced her."

"But what am I to do? I had better consult my friends."

"Your hypocritical favorites, your De Lorraine and your De Wardes. Let me manage this affair, Philippe. You desire that the Duke of Buckingham shall go away, do you not?"

"As speedily as possible, Madame."

"Well, send him to me, my son. Be courteous to him, and say nothing about the matter to your wife, the King, or anybody. Do not ask any one's advice but mine. Alas! I know what mischief is produced by evil counsellors in households."

"I will obey you, Madame."

"And you will be satisfied with the result. Find the duke."

"Oh, that will be easy enough."

"Where do you believe he is, then?"

"*Pardieu!* at Madame's door, waiting till she holds her levee, beyond a doubt."

"Well," returned Anne, calmly, "tell him to have the kindness to call on me."

Philippe kissed her hand, and started in search of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XCII.

FOREVER!

BUCKINGHAM'S response to the queen mother's invitation was his appearance before her half an hour after the Duc D'Orléans had gone.

When his name was pronounced by the usher, Anne of Austria, who was sitting with her elbow on the table and her head buried in her hands, rose and received with a smile the graceful and respectful salutation addressed to her by the duke.

Anne of Austria was still beautiful. We know that, when she was already advanced in years, her finely-shaped hands, long auburn tresses, and ruddy lips aroused the admiration of all who saw her.

At the present moment her heart was stirred by the memories of the past, and she looked as handsome as in her youthful days, when her palace was opened to admit Buckingham's father, that ardent and unfortunate young man, who had lived only for her and had died with her name on his lips.

The tender look which she fixed on the duke had in it a tenderness that was partly the affection of a mother and partly the fondness of a lover.

"Your Majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to see me?"

"Yes, duke," she answered in English; "pray be seated."

Her evident partiality for him and the welcome sound of the language of the country from which he had been severed since his sojourn in France touched the young man's heart deeply. He immediately surmised that the queen had something to ask of him.

After a few moments given to the melancholy recollections evoked by his presence, she resumed her smiling air and said:

"How does your grace like France?"

"It is a beautiful country," he answered.

"You have been here before, have you not?"

"Yes, Madame, once."

"But, of course, like every good Englishman, you prefer England?"

"Yes, I love my own land best," replied the duke. "But if your Majesty asked me whether I should prefer living in Paris or in London, I would answer that I preferred Paris."

Anne of Austria noticed how warmly these words were uttered.

"You possess, I have been told, some very fine estates, and live in a magnificent old palace."

"My father's palace, Madame," replied Buckingham, lowering his eyes.

"These are precious possessions and must be associated with precious remembrances," answered the queen, unable to refrain from touching on memories from which she found it hard to part entirely.

"Yes," said the duke, affected by the melancholy tone of the conversation, "those who are swayed by such feelings live as much in the past or future as in the present."

"True," said the queen, in a low voice. "And since you are a man of feeling, duke, you will soon leave France, return to England, and shut yourself up with the relics of the past."

Buckingham shook his head.

"I do not think so, Madame," said he.

"Why?"

"Because I intend, on the contrary, to leave England and take up my residence in France."

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to manifest her surprise.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you are not a favorite of the new King, then?"

"Oh, yes, I am. His Majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"Surely your fortune has not been impaired? I have learned that it is very considerable."

"It was never in a more flourishing condition, Madame."

"Then there must be some secret reason for your resolution?"

"No, Madame," answered Buckingham, quickly, "there is no secret connected with it. I like to live in France. I like its court for its good taste and refinement, and I like especially certain pleasures of a rather serious nature which are unknown in my own country and are only to be found here."

Anne of Austria replied, with an arch smile:

"Pleasures of a serious nature! Has your grace well reflected on the peculiar kind of seriousness that distinguishes these pleasures?"

The duke stammered.

"There is no pleasure sufficiently serious to keep a man of your rank here —"

"Madame," interrupted the duke, "it seems to me your Majesty dwells very strongly on this point."

"You really think so, duke?"

"Under your Majesty's favor, this is the second time you have spoken of the superiority of the attractions held out by England as a residence to those of France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man and laid her beautiful hand on his shoulder, which trembled at her touch.

"Believe me, duke," said she, "there is no place where a person can live with such satisfaction as in his native land. I have often had good cause to regret Spain. I have lived a long time, a very long time for a woman, and I confess that not a year of my life has passed in which I did not regret Spain."

"Not a year, Madame?" returned the duke, coldly, "not even one of those years when you were the acknowledged Queen of Beauty, as, indeed, you are still, for that matter?"

"A truce to flattery, duke; I am old enough to be your mother."

The tone in which she uttered these words penetrated the heart of Buckingham.

"Yes," she repeated, "old enough to be your mother, and that is why I feel justified in giving you some sound advice."

"To return to London, is it?" cried the duke.

"Yes, my lord duke," said she.

The young man wrung his hands in dismay. His appearance did not fail to excite the compassion of a woman already disposed to regard him affectionately.

"It has become necessary," she added.

"What!" he exclaimed, "do you tell me that I must depart, must exile myself, must fly away like a fugitive!"

"Did you speak of exile, duke? Why, to hear you, one would imagine that France was your native country!"

"Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love."

"Not another word, my lord duke," said the queen; "you forget to whom you are speaking!"

Buckingham fell upon his knees.

"Madame, Madame," he cried, "you are the source of all goodness, wisdom, and clemency; you are not only superior to all others in rank, you are superior to them in every angelic quality. Surely I have not said anything which merited such a cruel rebuke? Surely I have not betrayed myself, Madame?"

"You have betrayed yourself," answered the queen, in a low voice.

"I have said nothing! I know nothing!"

"You forget that you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman, and besides —"

"Besides, no one knows you are listening to me," he interrupted.

"On the contrary, it is known. You have the faults and virtues of youth."

"Who has betrayed me? Who has denounced me?"

"Why, who could have done so?"

"Those who at Havre, with their infernal penetration, read my heart as if it were an open book."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of M. de Bragelonne, for one."

"I have heard the name, but never met the person who bears it. M. de Bragelonne has never mentioned you."

"Then who was it? Oh, Madame, if any one has had the

audacity to detect in me what I do not wish to detect there myself —"

"What would you do, duke?"

"There are secrets that kill those who discover them."

"He who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, is still alive; moreover, you cannot kill him; he is armed with every right; he is a husband, a jealous husband, and he is the second gentleman in France; he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke turned pale.

"You are very cruel, Madame," he murmured.

"You see, Buckingham," said Anne, sadly, "how you pass from one extreme to another, always fighting shadows when you might so easily be at peace with yourself."

"When we fight, Madame, we die on the field of battle," answered Buckingham, gently, abandoning himself to the most morbid dejection.

Anne ran up to him and took his hand.

"Villiers," she cried in English, with a vehemence it was impossible to resist, "what is it you require? A mother to sacrifice her son? a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? You are a child; you do not think! To spare you a tear, Villiers, I must commit these two crimes? You have spoken of the dead. The dead were, at least, respectful and obedient. The dead inclined their heads when they received an order of exile; they carried with them in their hearts their despair as a precious possession, because that despair came from the woman they loved, and because death at her hands would be a sort of gift, a sort of favor."

Buckingham stood up, his features distorted, his hands pressed against his heart.

"You are right, Madame," said he; "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from lips that they loved; they were not chased; they were entreated to depart, and they were not ridiculed."

"No! on the contrary, they were always remembered with affection. But who says that you are chased, that you are exiled? Who says that your self-sacrifice will not be remembered? I speak, Villiers, on no one's behalf except on my own. Depart! Render me this service; do me this favor. Let me be under one more obligation to one of your name."

"Then you ask it for your sake?"

"For mine alone."

"And none of those who stay behind will dare to laugh at me; no one, though he were a prince, will say: 'It was by my order'?"

"Listen to me, duke."

And the august features of the aged queen assumed a solemn expression.

"I solemnly pledge you my word that no one commands here save me, and that not only shall no one either laugh at you or triumph over you, but that no one shall fail in that respect toward you which is due to your rank. Rely on me, duke, as I have relied on you."

"But you do not explain yourself, Madame. I am sufering torture, I feel desperate, and gentle and affectionate though your consoling words may be, they do not afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother?" asked the queen with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, Madame; but I remember that she used to cover me with her kisses and her tears when I wept."

"Villiers!" murmured the queen, putting her arm around his neck, "I feel for you as your mother did, and believe me, no one shall ever make my son weep."

"Thanks, Madame, thanks!" replied the young man, almost suffocated by emotion; "I feel that my heart has still room for a sentiment sweeter and nobler than love."

The queen mother gazed at him and pressed his hand.

"Go," said she.

"When am I to leave? Give your orders!"

"Select a time that suits you, duke. You are leaving, but you choose your own day for leaving. Instead of going to-day, as you would doubtless desire to do, or to-morrow, as others may have expected, you will start on the day after to-morrow in the evening. But announce your determination to leave to-day."

"My determination?"

"Yes, duke."

"And shall I never come back to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected a moment and was seemingly lost in sad and serious thought.

"It would afford me a sweet consolation," said she, "if you returned on the day when I shall be borne to my eternal rest in Saint-Denis beside my husband."

"That husband who occasioned you so much suffering!" muttered Buckingham.

"But who was King of France," replied the queen.

"Oh! Madame, you are grace itself; you are entering an era of prosperity; a tide of happiness is setting in for you. Believe me, you have the promise of a long life."

"In that case you will not come for some time," said the queen, trying to smile.

"I shall not return," answered Buckingham, sadly, "young though I may be."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Death, Madame, does not go by years; he is impartial; the young often die, and the old live on."

"No more of these gloomy ideas, duke; I am going to raise your spirits. What do you say to two years? Looking at that charming face of yours, I can read in it that the ideas which make you so gloomy to-day will have disappeared before six months shall have elapsed, and will be all dead and forgotten at the end of the period I have assigned you."

"I think you judged me more truly, Madame," replied the young man, "when you said just now that time does not change the men of the House of Buckingham."

"Hush! hush!" cried the queen, kissing him on the forehead with a tenderness she could not repress; "go! go! do not move me too deeply, and, above all, do not forget yourself again! I am the queen — you are the subject of the King of England. King Charles expects you. Farewell, Villiers, farewell!"

"Forever!" replied the young man.

And he fled, trying to keep back the tears.

Anne pressed her hands against her forehead; then, as she glanced at a mirror, she murmured:

"In spite of all that is said, a woman is always young; she is always only twenty in some corner of her heart."

CHAPTER XCIII.

IN WHICH LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT CONSIDER MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A NOBLEMAN OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE'S STATION.

Raoul and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris on the evening of the day when Buckingham had had this conversation with the queen.

Immediately on his arrival the count requested, through Raoul, an audience with the King.

The King had spent a part of the day in inspecting, along with Madame and the ladies of the court, certain rich stuffs, manufactured at Lyons, which he was about to offer to his sister-in-law. There had then been a court dinner, and then cards, after which the King, as was his usual custom, had risen at eight o'clock, and passed into his cabinet to work with Fouquet and Colbert.

Raoul entered the antechamber at the very moment the two ministers were leaving it, and the King perceived him through the half-open door.

"What do you want, M. de Bragelonne?" he asked.

The young man approached.

"Sire," he replied, "an audience for the Comte de la Fère; he has just come from Blois and is most anxious to have an interview with your Majesty."

"I have an hour at my disposal between cards and supper," answered the King. "Is M. de la Fère here?"

"He is downstairs, awaiting your Majesty's commands."

"Tell him to come up."

Five minutes later Athos entered. He was received by Louis with the gracious kindness which the King, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for those who could not be won over by ordinary favors.

"Count," said he, "I hope you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your Majesty that such is my purpose."

"Oh, I am glad of that!" answered the King, joyously. "What is it?"

"It is not for myself, Sire."

"So much the worse. Still I am ready to do for your friend what you will not let me do for yourself."

"Your Majesty encourages me. I have come to speak to your Majesty in behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as speaking in your own behalf, count."

"Not quite, Sire. What I ask in behalf of the viscount, I cannot ask in my own behalf. He is desirous of marrying."

"He is still very young, but that is of no consequence. He is already an exceedingly distinguished man; I shall find a wife for him."

"He has found her, and only waits for your Majesty's consent."

"Oh! so it is only a question of signing the marriage contract?"

Athos bowed.

"Does the lady he is going to wed meet your wishes in point of fortune and station?"

Athos hesitated a moment.

"She is of good birth," he answered, "but has no fortune."

"That is an evil for which we 'll easily find a remedy."

"I am deeply grateful to your Majesty. Nevertheless, you will permit me to say a few words."

"You may do so, count."

"Your Majesty would seem to have expressed your intention of bestowing a dowry on this young girl?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Should this be the result of my visit to the Louvre, it would pain me, Sire."

"No false delicacy, count. What is the lady's name?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," replied Athos, coldly.

"Ah!" said the King, trying to recollect, "I ought to know that name. Yes, the Marquis de la Vallière —"

"She is his daughter, Sire."

"He is dead, is he not?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And the widow married a second time M. de Saint-Remy, steward to the dowager duchess?"

"Your Majesty is correctly informed."

"Yes, yes, I knew I was right. And I know also that the young lady is one of Madame's maids of honor."

"Your Majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The King considered for a moment, and after stealing a glance at the anxious face of Athos, said:

"This young lady is not, so far as I remember, very pretty, count?"

"I have not looked at her very closely," replied Athos.

"But I have. I was not greatly struck with her."

"She has not much beauty, Sire, but she is gentle and modest-looking."

"Her fair hair is beautiful, though."

"I believe so."

"And her blue eyes are very fine."

"No doubt, Sire."

"Well, so far as beauty goes, the match is but an ordinary one; now for the money side of the question."

"Her dowry is, I fancy, some fifteen or twenty thousand livres; but the lovers are very little troubled about that, and I do not attach much importance to money myself."

"You mean to money in excess of your wants. But a needful amount of it is indispensable. A woman without other property than fifteen thousand livres cannot live at court. We will make up the deficit; I will do so for Bragelonne's sake."

Athos bowed. The King again noticed his coldness of demeanor.

"And now let us pass from money to station," continued Louis. "Nothing can be said in this relation against a daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, but, unfortunately, there is our honest friend Saint-Remy, who hardly does credit to the house. You are, if I am not mistaken, very particular in such matters, count? You are, naturally, proud of your family?"

"I am at present only proud of my devotion to your Majesty."

The King paused.

"By the way," he said at length, "you have caused me a good deal of surprise all through this conversation. You come here to ask my consent to a marriage, and you seem to make this request very reluctantly. Oh, young as I am, I rarely make a mistake. In the case of some, my friendship for them acts as a stimulus to my understanding; in the case of others, my distrust doubles my power of penetration. I repeat it; you do not make this request from your heart."

"Well, Sire, you are right."

"I do not understand you. Why have you not refused your own consent?"

"I could not, Sire. All my affection is concentrated on Bragelonne. He is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière and has formed radiant visions for the future. I am not one of those who care to shatter the illusions of youth. I do not like this marriage, but I beg your Majesty to give your consent at the earliest possible moment and thus make Raoul happy."

"We 'll see to that, count. By the way, does she love him?"

"If your Majesty insists on my being frank with you, I will say that I have no confidence in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's love. She is young — little more than a child — and intoxicated by her new prospects. The pleasure of being at court, the honor of being in Madame's service, counteract in her head whatever affection she might have in her heart. It will be the kind of marriage of which your Majesty sees many examples at court. But Bragelonne wishes it and I am content."

"And yet you are not like one of those easy-going fathers who become slaves to their children," said the King.

"Sire, I can be resolute enough against the viciously inclined, but not against the honest and upright. Raoul has been in great grief and affliction. His spirits, usually gay and cheerful, have become clouded and dull. I do not wish your Majesty to be deprived of such services as he is able to render you."

"I understand you, count," said the King, "and above all, I understand the feeling that is in your heart."

"Then," replied the count, "there is no occasion to tell your Majesty that the happiness of these children, or rather of my own child, is the object of my visit."

"And I, like yourself, am anxious for the happiness of M. de Bragelonne."

"I await only your Majesty's signature, Sire. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before you and receiving your consent."

"You are in error, count," answered the King, firmly; "I told you that I wished for the viscount's happiness; consequently I am at present opposed to this marriage."

"But, Sire, your Majesty promised —"

"Not that, count. I did not promise you that, for it is opposed to my views."

"I appreciate all your Majesty's benevolent and generous intentions in my regard. But I take the liberty of reminding you that I have pledged myself to come here as an ambassador."

"An ambassador often asks, and does not always get what he asks."

"Ah! Sire, what a blow this will be to Bragelonne!"

"Then I 'll deal it; I will speak to the viscount myself."

"Love, Sire, is an irresistible force."

"No, it can be resisted; I can say that from personal experience."

"Yes, by one who possesses a royal heart, such a heart as yours, Sire."

"Do not be uneasy about the matter. I have my own views in connection with Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière; but I do not wish him to marry so early. I do not wish him to marry her until she has a fortune, and until he, on his side, has merited the favors which I am very ready to bestow on him. In short, count, I wish them to wait."

"Sire, allow me —"

"Monsieur you told me you came to ask a favor of me?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Well, grant me one, instead. Let us not speak of the matter any further. I expect there will be war before long; I shall require gentlemen about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man, the father of a family; I should hesitate also, on Bragelonne's account, to bestow a dowry on a young girl who is a stranger to me; it would excite jealousy among my nobles."

Athos bowed but did not answer.

"Was this all you had to ask of me?" added the King.

"All, Sire, and I beg to take my leave of your Majesty. Is it necessary that I should inform Raoul?"

"Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance of doing so. Tell the viscount I wish to speak to him to-morrow at my levee. To-night, count, I shall expect you at my card-table."

"I am in travelling costume, Sire."

"The day will come, I hope, when you will not quit me. The monarchy will soon be so firmly established that I shall be able to offer you such hospitality as befits your merits."

"Sire, when a king lives in the hearts of his subjects, it is of

little consequence what palace he inhabits, for he is worshipped in a temple."

Whereupon Athos retired, and found Bragelonne waiting for him.

"Well, monsieur?" inquired the young man.

"Raoul, the King is well disposed in your regard; perhaps not in the way you wish, but he feels the highest interest in the fortunes of our house."

"Monsieur, you bring bad news," said the young man, turning pale.

"You will learn from the King's lips to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"But has the King signed?"

"The King wishes to make the contract himself, Raoul; and he attaches so much importance to the articles that he requires time. Blame your impatience rather than the good intentions of the King."

Raoul was in dismay, for he was thoroughly acquainted with the count's frankness as well as with his tact. He remained plunged in a dull, heavy stupor.

"Are you not coming with me?" inquired Athos.

"Yes, monsieur, I am," he stammered, and he followed Athos downstairs.

"Oh, by the way, since I am here, could I not see M. d'Artagnan?" the count asked abruptly.

"Shall I lead you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.

"If you please."

"We go by another staircase."

They altered their course; but when they reached the landing of the grand gallery, Raoul caught sight of one of the Comte de Guiche's lackeys. The man ran up to him upon hearing his voice.

"What is the matter?" said Raoul.

"A letter for you, monsieur. I have been looking for you the last hour. M. le Comte knew of your return, and wrote to you immediately."

Raoul approached Athos before he broke the seal.

"With your permission, monsieur?" he asked.

"Certainly," answered Athos.

"*Dear Raoul*," wrote the Comte de Guiche, "*I have to deal with an important matter that must be arranged at once. I know you have arrived; come quickly.*"

He had hardly finished the note when a lackey in Buckingham's livery advanced from the gallery, and, recognizing Raoul, said respectfully:

"From his grace the Duke of Buckingham."

"Oh!" cried Athos, "I see you are already as busy as the general of an army. I leave you, and will manage to find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"Please excuse me," said Raoul.

"Yes, I excuse you. Good-bye, Raoul. You will find me in my apartments until to-morrow evening. Then I shall start for Blois, unless I receive orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, monsieur."

Athos went out.

Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

"*M. de Bragelonne*," said the duke, "*I know no Frenchman whom I like as well as I do you. I stand at present in need of your friendship. I have received a certain message written in good French. Being an Englishman, I am afraid I may not understand it perfectly. The name at the bottom of the letter is an honorable one, and that is all I know about it. I have learned that you are back from Blois. Would you be kind enough to call upon me?*

"*Yours devotedly,*

"*Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.*"

"I am going to call on your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's lackey. "And I shall be with his grace inside of an hour," he added, dismissing the duke's messenger.